

THE ARGOSY.

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THE GREY MONK.

BY T. W. SPEIGHT, AUTHOR OF "THE MYSTERIES OF HERON
DYKE."

CHAPTER XXVI.

GIOVANNA AT MAYLINGS.

WHILE the events last recorded were working themselves out at St. Oswyth's, affairs at Withington Chase had not been at a standstill.

Luigi Rispani, now known to the world under his assumed name of Lewis Clare, had taken up his quarters at the Chase in his position as Sir Gilbert's grandson, while Giovanna, otherwise Mrs. Clare, his supposed mother, was duly installed at Maylings, the house which the Baronet had had specially fitted up for her occupancy.

Plain to the verge of ugliness as far as its architectural pretensions were concerned, but roomy and homelike indoors, Maylings, which dated from the era of the Second George, was far too large a domicile for the limited requirements of Mrs. Clare; so much so, indeed, that Sir Gilbert contented himself with having about half its number of rooms furnished and made habitable. Its situation was somewhat lonely, there being no other house within a quarter of a mile of it. It stood back from the high road, fronting a huge clump of evergreens and a small carriage sweep, but from the drawing-room windows in the rear of the house one looked into a charming old-fashioned flower-garden. To Giovanna it all seemed very lonely and very dull.

One other thing, however, Sir Gilbert did which filled her with unfeigned pleasure, and that was to make her a present of a horse and brougham. And within a few days there arrived a grand piano, of which Giovanna at once determined to avail herself to the utmost. She had been gifted by nature with a full rich contralto voice, together with a large measure of that musical talent which seems inherent

in the children of the Sunny South ; but her life hitherto had afforded her no opportunity of cultivating either one or the other. Now, however, her opportunity had come, and the very first time Captain Verinder came to see her, she requested him to find her a competent teacher, male or female, she did not care which. Thus it presently came to pass that Signor Sampi, a grey-haired but clever musician, journeyed twice a week to Maylings, and in the cultivation of her long-neglected gifts Giovanna found a new pleasure in life.

Not for many a long year had such a sensation been known among the good folk of Mapleford and its neighbourhood as that with which Sir Gilbert Clare had provided them, and they did not fail to appreciate it to the full.

Giovanna had not been settled at Maylings more than a couple of days, before one carriage after another of the local gentry began to include it in their round of afternoon calls, and she found herself the recipient of quite a shower of visiting cards. Then presently Giovanna found herself under the necessity of returning at least a portion of the calls. She was a firm believer in first impressions, and for some of her callers she had conceived an immediate dislike which caused her silently to determine to see as little of them as possible in time to come. That, of course, is not the code of English society, which teaches us to smile our sweetest on those whom we dislike the most. But Giovanna had always been in the habit of giving way to her impulses, and she still had much to learn.

Sir Gilbert had felt from the first that it would not do for his daughter-in-law to live entirely alone. She must have some one of suitable age and character to fill the post of companion to her, whose services should be remunerated out of his own pocket. Accordingly he made it his business to call upon Mrs. Merton, the vicar's wife, and enlist her services in his behalf. It did not take that lady long to find precisely the kind of person Sir Gilbert wanted, in a certain Mrs. Tew, the widow of a minor canon, who, owing to some unfortunate speculations on her late husband's part, had found herself at his death but just removed beyond the verge of penury. Mrs. Tew was a lively, well-preserved little lady of fifty-five, who had seen something of the world in her youth, was tolerably well read, and contrived to keep herself fairly *au courant* with the chief topics of the day. She had not been long in her new position before she discovered that one of her principal duties would be to "make talk," both when people called upon Mrs. Clare, and when the latter returned their visits. No task could have been found more congenial to the canon's widow. She had always cherished the opinion that she was gifted with considerable conversational powers, although it was one which her late husband, who was of a morose, brooding disposition, had not encouraged her to reduce to practice, either in public or private. Now, however, that an opportunity was afforded her of compensating herself for the repression of years, she did not fail to avail herself of it. And as the

little lady had a really pleasant manner, and never seemed at a loss for either ideas or words, and as no slightest tincture of malice ever tipped her tongue, everyone with whom she was brought into contact had a good word to say about her.

At no time had Giovanna been a loquacious woman, and it was not likely that she would willingly allow the people among whom she now mixed to discover how terribly ignorant she was about many of the subjects on which they talked so glibly. She had naturally good manners, and had been well trained by her English mother as long as that mother had lived, besides which she had excellent taste in dress, all of which told in her favour. But, when it became a question of something beyond manners and dress, Giovanna knew that, for her own credit's sake, her part in the social comedy must to all intents and purposes be a silent one. Her place was to listen to everybody with smiling courtesy, and to look as if she felt an intelligent interest in all that was talked about, but to say as little as possible in return; and, above all, unless driven into a corner, never to originate any proposition of her own.

It was precisely here that she found Mrs. Tew so invaluable. That lady proved herself a person of infinite tact and resource. Whenever there seemed a risk of Mrs. Clare being drawn into a conversation about matters concerning which, as the canon's widow surmised, she was probably more or less ignorant, she, Mrs. Tew, came boldly to her rescue, and by means of some apposite remark or pertinent question, addressed directly to some other person in the company, contrived to attract the current of talk to herself, or else to deflect it into some less dangerous channel.

Giovanna was sufficiently clear-sighted to see through Mrs. Tew's object, and was proportionately grateful; not being like some of her sex, who would have been more than annoyed at finding that their paid dependent had taken upon herself to gauge their ignorance, and had had the impertinence to assume that their educational acquirements were not on a par with those of the people with whom, for anything the said dependent was supposed to know to the contrary, they had been in the habit of mixing from youth upward. But whatever her faults in other directions might be, Giovanna had no false pride about her, and was not afflicted with any deficiency of common-sense.

Then again, the canon's widow had the tact never to bore Giovanna with too much, either of her talk or her company, when they two were at home together. The widow had her own cosy sitting-room, and there, when her presence was not required elsewhere, what between needlework and novel-reading, she never found the time hang heavy on her hands. The late canon had objected to novels on principle as being a species of mental pabulum beneath the consideration of reasonable beings, as well as entailing results which in many cases were positively harmful, and as long as he lived his wife

had meekly acquiesced in his dictum. Now, however, that she was her own mistress, she proceeded to indemnify her starved imagination for its long abstinence. Fortunately there was a very tolerable library in Mapleford, which for her proved an inexhaustible mine of intellectual treasures. It mattered not that numbers of the works on its shelves dated back a quarter of a century or more, to her they were as new, fresh, and wonderful—perhaps more so—as if they had borne yesterday's imprimatur. And how she revelled in the love stories, dear little lady that she was! Hers had been a repressed and unsatisfied existence, and now when she sat, often till long after the rest of the household was abed, deep in some sweet tale of love and constancy, of partings and comings together again, she would feel for a little while as if she were again a girl in her teens with all life's possibilities still before her. Then, when she had read the last line of the last chapter, she would shut the book with a sigh and remove her spectacles, and murmur under her breath, "What would dear Stephen say if he knew how I had been occupying my time? I am afraid he would think me greatly to blame." For all that, undeterred by any qualms of conscience, she would begin a fresh novel next day with an unappeased appetite.

While Sir Gilbert had been at the pains to provide his daughter-in-law with a suitable companion, he doubtless expected, if the matter ever crossed his mind, that she would provide her own maid. But Giovanna, who all her life had been used to wait on herself, would have been quite satisfied to go on doing the same for ever had not Captain Verinder impressed upon her that, for a person in her position, a maid was an absolute necessity. Further than that, he undertook to supply her with the necessity in question, which he did in the person of Lucille Fretin, the daughter of one of his many more or less impecunious foreign acquaintances. It was quite understood between Lucille and the Captain that she should keep both her eyes and ears open, so as to be in a position to furnish him with a minute account of everything that went on under the roof at Maylings, together with any scraps of gossip, or information which might reach her anent the Chase and its inmates.

Captain Verinder, in view of the unaccountable dislike which Sir Gilbert Clare had conceived for him, kept strictly within the limits of the line of conduct which he had laid down for himself. The Chase itself he never went near, but on one evening in each week, when he knew that Giovanna was not dining with the Baronet, he ran down by the train which reached Mapleford at seven o'clock, driving from the station to Maylings in a fly, and walking back in time to catch the last up train.

When Giovanna, before her arrival at Maylings, put into her uncle's hands the cheque given her by Sir Gilbert, with a request that he would get it cashed for her, he made up his mind that ten pounds out of the hundred should find their way into his own pocket, as

representing his modest commission on the very clever stroke of business which he had just succeeded in bringing to so fortunate a termination. He would give her further to understand that he should look forward to being allowed a similar sum out of each quarterly cheque of which his niece would henceforward be the recipient. But when, without a word or a hint on his part, Giovanna put into his hands, not ten, but twenty pounds of the hundred, he determined to wait and see what the next quarter would do for him; for it seemed not unlikely that he might benefit more by trusting to his generosity than by putting forward anything in the shape of a definite claim on his own account.

Certainly, forty, or even eighty pounds a year was not a very magnificent sum: still, it would make an acceptable addition to his limited income; besides which, he looked forward to squeezing a further allowance out of Luigi. Of course, when in the not distant future, as he trusted, Luigi should have become Sir Lewis Clare, with a rent-roll of something like eight thousand a year (for there was little doubt, unless he should make a consummate ass of himself meanwhile, that his grandfather would constitute him his heir), then indeed matters would assume a very different aspect so far as he, Augustus Verinder, was concerned. Meanwhile it was the day of small things and he must content himself as best he could to play a waiting game.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"MR. LEWIS CLARE."

TWICE in each week, on Sunday and Wednesday, Giovanna dined at the Chase. It was a standing invitation which included Mrs. Tew, while Everard Lisle made a frequent fifth at the table. Luigi was there as a matter of course.

With his acknowledgment of his grandson and his daughter-in-law a fresh element had been imported into Sir Gilbert's life; but settled habits had too strong a hold upon him, and the groove in which he habitually moved had been trodden by him for too many years to allow of much deviation on his part, even under circumstances so exceptional as those the evolution of which we have thus far followed.

The fact of Luigi being now domiciled at the Chase in no way influenced or affected the position of Everard Lisle. Seeing that his grandson could neither play chess nor backgammon, Sir Gilbert was still as much dependent on Lisle as before for his after-dinner game, which seemed to have now become one of the settled institutions of his life.

If between Everard and Luigi there was no particular show of cordiality, as there certainly was not, there was at least a veneer of friendliness which, as is so often the case, served as a very fair substi-

tute for the real article. Indeed, Lisle on his part had no desire to be on other than friendly terms with his employer's grandson ; but Luigi would gladly have given a helping hand, could he have seen his way to do so, in causing the other to be sent about his business ; or have taken steps to poison his grandfather's mind against him, had he not felt that the game was too dangerous a one to be entered upon while his own footing at the Chase had about it such elements of instability. That he was secretly jealous of Everard's influence over Sir Gilbert and of the latter's undisguised liking for him, hardly needs to be recorded ; but he had wit enough to allow nothing of it to be seen on the surface ; besides which, both his time and his thoughts were just then occupied with matters which concerned him far more nearly.

As may, or may not, be borne in mind by the reader, Sir Gilbert, at a certain memorable interview, intimated that, in his opinion, it was not too late for Luigi to apply himself to the acquisition of certain of those accomplishments which he, the Baronet, held to be essential to the education of a gentleman. Thus it came to pass that Luigi had not been more than a week at the Chase before he found himself put into the hands of the Rev. Eldred Merton, the vicar of St. Michael's, who had been known in his time as a successful "coach," with a view of having at least a smattering of classical lore instilled into him.

Then for Luigi began a period of purgatory, such as in his after-life he never looked back to without a shudder. He was utterly devoid of linguistic gifts, in any case as far as the dead languages were concerned, and before long he became the despair of his tutor ; who, however, would not acknowledge himself beaten, for one reason, perhaps, because, being a married man with a numerous family, Sir Gilbert's guineas were very acceptable to him. So, four mornings in each week saw Luigi at the vicarage, and when his two hours' lesson had come to an end, it would have been hard to say whether pupil or tutor was the more rejoiced of the two.

But there was another series of lessons which Luigi was compelled by his grandfather to undergo, and which to him were a source of torture almost as keen, although different in kind, as that caused him by his classical studies. The lessons in question were those necessitated by the art of learning to ride. As it happened, Luigi had never been on horseback in his life, nor would he ever of his own free will have aspired to that "bad eminence." Both morally and physically he was an arrant coward, and, from his point of view, everyone who bestrode a horse ran a certain amount of risk to life and limb, which, for his part, he would very gladly have eschewed had it been in his power to do so. But his grandfather's orders were imperative, and there was nothing for him but to obey with the best grace possible. So, there being no such thing as a riding-school at Mapleford, Mr. Marsh from the livery-stables came over to the Chase on three after-

noons in each week "in order to put the young squire through his paces," as he termed it. Never, as later on he openly avowed, had he had a pupil who made such slow progress and did him so little credit. "He's a regular funkier, that's what he is," he would tell his wife in confidence. "He has no more pluck than a chicken. Not a bit like his father used to be at his age. Why, before Master Alec was eighteen, there was hardly a fence or a gate in the county that he hadn't topped. This chap will never top one as long as he lives."

Truth to tell, Luigi never succeeded in getting the better of the nervousness which invariably assailed him the moment he found himself astride a horse's back. After he had taken his twentieth lesson his timidity was as extreme as when he took his first. He was a coward by nature, and it was impossible for him to be anything else.

Being the kind of young man he was, that he should be terribly bored by the limitations of his life at the Chase goes without saying. To begin with, he hated the country. He missed his London acquaintances and the free-and-easy life to which he had been used in the metropolis. Then again, as the days and weeks went by, he never quite succeeded in feeling at his ease when in the presence of Sir Gilbert, nor even of demeaning himself as if he were. When they were together, it seemed as though he were unable to rid himself of a vivid sense of the guilty part he was playing, such as rarely troubled his easy-going conscience at other times. His manner was timid and nervous; indeed, whenever the Baronet betrayed an extra touch of irritability, it might almost be termed servile. He had somewhat the air of a cur who is conscious that the lash may come down on him at any moment.

But, by-and-by, when he perceived that it was possible to do so without much risk of detection, he began, on two or three afternoons a week, to find his way to the *King's Head* at Mapleford (being always careful to get back to the Chase in time for dinner), where was a billiard-room which was frequented by all the fast young men of the little town. There Luigi felt himself thoroughly at home; there his only happy hours were spent. He could handle a cue with some degree of proficiency, and, as the grandson of Sir Gilbert Clare and the prospective owner of Withington Chase, he took a certain social precedence over the other frequenters of the room. For the first time in his life he found himself flattered and made much of, and the sensation was an eminently agreeable one. But such company cannot be indulged in without a certain amount of expense, and it was a necessity of the position which had been so ungrudgingly accorded him that Luigi should spend his money with an air of careless liberality which was far from being native to him. Thus it fell out that what remained of the baronet's fifty pounds, after Captain Verinder had borrowed five of it, and he had equipped

himself with a limited supply of those articles which the latter assured him were absolutely indispensable to his new position, began, when once he had taken to frequenting the *King's Head*, to melt away in a quite alarming fashion. As a consequence, he was presently compelled to apply to Giovanna for a loan of ten pounds, which, however, she refused to let him have till he had given her his solemn promise to repay her out of Sir Gilbert's next cheque.

At this time Luigi saw very little of Captain Verinder, or rather, the latter saw very little of him, although he more than once sent word through Giovanna that if it were not convenient for his nephew to meet him at Maylings, he had but to name his own time and place and the Captain would not fail to be there. But Luigi was never without an excuse of some kind for not making an appointment, and, indeed, exhibited a quite unaccountable reluctance to indulge in the pleasure of a *tête-à-tête* with his uncle. What he told himself was, that he was his own master now, at least as far as Verinder was concerned, and wasn't going to let himself be "preached at" by anybody: and that the Captain would preach at him, as he termed it, whenever they should come together, he felt fully assured. Besides, he had already discovered that his respected relative was possessed of a quite abnormal faculty for borrowing money, and having himself such a limited supply of that commodity, he was affectionately unwilling to subject his uncle to the pain of a refusal.

"Ungrateful hound!" exclaimed the Captain one day in a rage to Giovanna. "Does he dream, after all I have done for him, that he is at liberty to cast me off like an old glove? I will teach him a different lesson from that before he is much older."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE PROGRESS OF EVENTS.

AMONG other letters which Sir Gilbert Clare found on his breakfast-table on a certain September morning, was one which caused him to wrinkle his forehead and arch his shaggy eyebrows in a way by no means usual with him. Before laying it down he read it carefully through a second time, and then, unheeding of his other correspondence, and of the small china teapot at his elbow which was always brought in by Trant, the butler, the moment his master made his appearance, he lapsed into one of those fits of absent-mindedness which, in his case, were becoming more frequent with advancing years.

Luigi, from the opposite side of the table, was watching him with furtive eyes, and wondering whether it would be possible to obtain a sly glance over the letter which had had such an unusual effect upon his "grandfather."

Could he have had his wish, he would have read as follows :

"The Shrublands, Tuesday.

"MY DEAR GILBERT.—Please turn to the signature before reading further and satisfy yourself that it is really I who am writing to you after all this long time ; for indeed, cousin, it must be nearly, if not quite, a score of years since we met last (it was shortly after my marriage, I remember), and no communication of any kind has passed between us in the interim.

"As you may perhaps recollect, I was always afflicted with a restless and roving disposition, and since poor dear Sir Thomas's death (now eight years ago) I have felt no disposition to permanently settle anywhere, but have preferred to live a wandering, Bedouin kind of life, pitching my tent here, there, or anywhere, but never for very long at a time. It is a species of existence which, although it is lacking in those elements of stability so precious to the majority of my home-clinging, hearth-loving sex, has yet about it certain elements of variety and entertainment which, in my estimation, more than serve to counterbalance its shortcomings.

"Finding myself here at the Shrublands in fulfilment of a promise of long-standing, and within half-a-dozen miles of your place, it has seemed to me (old memories even now not being quite dormant within me) that I could not do otherwise than make you aware of my propinquity and, further, intimate that if you can 'put me up' for a couple of nights—no longer—(together with my companion and maid), I shall be pleased to find myself once more under a roof which is associated in my mind with so many pleasant memories of the days that are no more.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"LOUISA PELL."

Between Sir Gilbert and Lady Pell, when they were young people, there had been a something which, if it could not in strictness be termed a romantic episode, yet had in it the possibilities of one, and, had the fates proved propitious, would probably have eventuated in a way which would have changed the current of both their lives.

It was during the lifetime of Sir Gilbert's father and mother that Louisa Grayson, a tall, dashing, somewhat hoydenish girl of eighteen, was invited on a long visit to Withington Chase. Mr. Gilbert Clare, as he was then, who had just returned from a journey in Central America, had felt himself drawn towards his high-spirited, bright-eyed cousin, who, although few people would have called her handsome, was possessed of some singularly attractive qualities ; while she, on her side, fell frankly in love with him. But it was not to be. Miss Grayson was summoned home by the dangerous illness of a relative, and her cousin let her go without putting to her the one definite question which her heart was hungering to be asked ; after which

quite a number of years passed before they met again. On his part, at least, it could have been nothing more than a passing fancy, seeing that within a twelvemonth of their parting, Sir Gilbert had seen, fallen in love with, and married his first wife. Whether in Lady Pell's case it had proved to be more than a passing fancy was a question which she alone could have answered.

"I shall be very glad to see Louisa, very glad indeed," murmured Sir Gilbert under his breath when he had read her letter for the second time, "and I take it as a favour on her part that she has offered to come to the Chase. Of course at our time of life—although I don't forget that she is a number of years younger than I—she cannot be so foolish as to imagine— No, no; I will give her credit for more sense than that. She is no longer a flighty romantic schoolgirl; indeed, I remember that when I saw her last, she impressed me as having developed into quite a woman of the world. Still, a widow— Um—um."

With that, as already related, he lapsed into one of his musing fits, which lasted till the entrance of Trant, who coughed and gazed reproachfully at his master on finding that he had not yet poured out his first cup of tea.

The first thing the Baronet did on retiring to his study after breakfast was to reply to Lady Pell's letter.

"MY DEAR LOUISA," he wrote,—"Come to the Chase by all means—you ought to have come years ago—and stay as long as it suits you—the longer the better. You may rely upon receiving the heartiest of welcomes from

"Your affectionate cousin,

"GILBERT CLARE."

This missive he at once despatched by a mounted groom to the Shrublands.

Now, in the course of the forenoon of the day preceding the arrival of Lady Pell's note, Giovanna had driven over from Maylings and had asked to see Sir Gilbert. The proceeding was such an unusual one on her part that it was not without a spice of anxiety that he joined her in the morning-room. But she at once reassured him that, as far as he was concerned, nothing serious was the matter.

"I have this morning received a letter from home," began Giovanna, "that is to say, from Catanzaro," she added by way of correcting herself, "which informs me that my grandmother (my father's mother), who is over ninety years of age, is dangerously ill and has expressed a strong desire to see me. Under the circumstances, Sir Gilbert, you will probably agree with me that it is my duty to hasten to her side. It will doubtless be the last opportunity I shall have of seeing her, but I did not care to set out on so long a journey without first taking your opinion in the matter."

"That was very thoughtful of you, my dear madam, very thoughtful

indeed," replied the Baronet with a gratified air. "It is clearly your duty to lose no time in carrying out your venerable relative's wish. Is it your desire that your son should accompany you?"

"Oh dear, no, Sir Gilbert," replied Mrs. Clare hastily. "In cases where there is sickness in a house I have always found that young men are only in the way. They are not merely uncomfortable themselves but a source of discomfort to others."

"Very possibly you are right, madam. But my idea in mentioning your son was that he would be in a position to act as your travelling escort."

"But I am quite used to travelling alone, I assure you, Sir Gilbert, and am not in the least timid. For instance, when I returned from America I was quite alone."

"Possibly so, madam, possibly so," returned the Baronet stiffly. "That is a matter which pertains to the past and with which I have nothing to do. But it seemed to me that, in the position you now occupy as my daughter-in-law, you ought not to——"

"Pardon me, Sir Gilbert," interposed Giovanna in her smoothest tones, the blunder of which she had been guilty dawning on her with a rush, "my remark had reference to an escort of the male sex only. It was far from my intention to travel alone. As a matter of course my maid will accompany me."

The Baronet's brow cleared in some measure. "Um—um. I had not thought about your maid. Of course—of course. But what, now, if Mrs. Tew were also to keep you company? In such a case expense need be no consideration."

"It is very kind of you to say so, sir. My first thought was to ask Mrs. Tew to share my journey, but then I called to mind that she is no longer so young as she has been, and that she is far from strong; and as it is my intention to get through to Catanzaro without stopping anywhere longer than may be necessitated by the change from one train or vehicle to another, I would not willingly run the risk of her breaking down by the way."

"Probably you are right, madam; the affair had not struck me in that light. As you say, at Mrs. Tew's time of life such a long and hurried journey might overtask her strength."

Speaking thus, he crossed to a side table where were pen and ink, and having extracted his cheque book from his breast pocket, he proceeded with the deliberation of old age to fill up a cheque for thirty guineas. Giovanna rose as he recrossed the room. She understood that the interview was at an end.

"Here is something towards defraying the expenses of your journey," he said as he pressed the cheque into her hand. "I trust that you will find your aged relative much improved by the time you reach her and that she may be spared to you for several years to come. Should you wish to see Lewis before setting out, as I presume you will, you will find him at the vicarage, which you will drive past on your way home. We shall miss you greatly and shall hope to see

you again as speedily as may be. And, by the way, will you inform Mrs. Tew, with my compliments, that during your unavoidable absence we shall expect her at the Chase as usual."

Sir Gilbert escorted Giovanna to the door, where her brougham was waiting. As they shook hands and bade each other adieu no slightest prevision was in the mind of either that, as far as this world was concerned, it was their final farewell. For, like so many of us, they were the slaves of events, already in process of evolution, of which they had no cognisance and in the bringing about of which they had no share. They never met again.

Giovanna did not fail to deliver Sir Gilbert's message to Mrs. Tew, adding, "And of course the brougham will be wholly at your disposal while I am away."

Tears came into the little lady's eyes. "Both you and Sir Gilbert are most kind," she said, "and I am at a loss how to thank you sufficiently."

There had been no thought or intention on Giovanna's part of taking either Mrs. Tew or Lucille with her to Italy, and although, the moment her oversight was made patent to her, she hastened to assure Sir Gilbert that she had all along meant her maid to accompany her, the statement had merely emanated from her on the spur of the moment as being the only way in which she could extricate herself from the difficulty. Putting aside the additional expense to which she would have been put, which she felt she could ill afford, there existed other and more cogent reasons why neither Lucille nor anyone else who knew her as Sir Gilbert Clare's daughter-in-law should accompany her to Catanzaro. For one thing, certain of her relatives on her father's side were little removed above the rank of peasants, while none of them were of a kind that would have reflected credit on her new position. Further, to none of them, for certain prudential reasons, had the secret of that position been divulged. Nobody at Catanzaro, when she should reappear among them, would know her as other than the daughter of the late Giuseppe Rispani, landlord of the *Golden Fig*, who, because she had the misfortune to have an Englishwoman for her mother, had chosen to take up her abode in that mother's native country. It was plainly imperative that on no account must Lucille be allowed to keep her company on her journey; but, for all that, after what she had told Sir Gilbert, it would not do to leave the girl behind at Maylings.

The letter from Catanzaro had, in the first instance, been addressed to Captain Verinder's lodgings, and had been reposted by him to Vanna, who now telegraphed to her uncle that she should leave Mapleford by a certain train, and requested him to meet her at the London terminus, which he accordingly did. Taking him out of earshot of her maid, Vanna in very few words put him in possession of the facts of the case. He quite agreed with her that her journey must be undertaken alone. So presently the girl was given half-a-sovereign

and told that she could go back to her parents ; in other words, take a holiday till she should hear from Captain Verinder, and that meanwhile her wages would go on as usual. It was an arrangement which suited Lucille to a nicety. Then Captain Verinder escorted his niece from one terminus to the other, and a little later saw her off by the Continental night mail.

But there were certain features in connection with Giovanna's proposed visit to Catanzaro which she had not deemed it advisable to reveal to anyone. The fact was that old Signora Rispani was quite a wealthy person for one in her station of life, and Vanna, who had always been her favourite grand-daughter, was drawn to her death-bed more by the hope of inheriting, if not the whole, then a very considerable portion of her money, than by any real affection which she entertained for the old lady. In telling Sir Gilbert that her grandmother had expressed a strong desire to see her she had stated more than she was warranted in doing. In reality it was the signora's medical attendant who, in accordance with an arrangement Giovanna had made with him before coming to England, had informed her by letter of her grandmother's critical condition. It will be enough to state here that the signora held out for several weeks after her grand-daughter's arrival, so that it was not till towards the middle of October that Mrs. Clare, richer by some hundreds of pounds than she had been on her arrival, once more set her face Englandwards, with a devout hope in her heart that she should never be under the necessity of setting eyes on Catanzaro or any of its inhabitants again.

But many strange things had happened while she had been away.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ARRIVALS AT THE CHASE.

It was in the course of the afternoon of the second day after the departure of Mrs. Clare that Lady Pell, accompanied by Miss Ethel Thursby, arrived at Withington Chase (her maid, in company with the luggage, would follow later on). They had been driven over from the Shrublands in Mrs. Forester's landau. Sir Gilbert was waiting in the entrance-hall to receive them. As Lady Pell advanced he went forward with outstretched hand.

"Welcome, Louisa, thrice welcome to the Chase!" he said in his most cordial tones. "It is indeed an immense pleasure to me to see you again after so long a time." With that he drew her closer, and stooping a little—for tall though her ladyship was, he was considerably the taller of the two—imprinted a cousinly salute on her cheek, which might once have been round, but was so no longer.

Sir Gilbert had never kissed her but once previously, when she was a girl of eighteen, and only a few hours before her mother's illness had

summoned her away at a moment's notice. It was a kiss which had given birth in her heart to many delicious hopes, never destined to be fulfilled, and it still lived in her memory like the faint vague fragrance exhaled from a *pot-pourri*. But to-day her cousin's second kiss, so wholly unexpected, recalled in all its pain and all its sweetness that incident of long ago. For a moment or two her heart throbbed so that she could not speak. Then, with a little shiver, she came back to the present.

"It is very kind of you, cousin, to say such pretty things to me," she replied, with a curious little tremor in her voice and a dim wistful smile. Then, more composedly: "But, indeed, I must ask you to believe me, when I assure you that I am as pleased to find myself again at the dear old Chase as you can possibly be to see me here. And now you must allow me to introduce to you Miss Ethel Thursby, a very dear young friend of mine, who is good enough to keep an old woman company, and put up with her vagaries while her regular companion is incapacitated by illness." Then turning to Ethel: "Child, this is my kinsman, Sir Gilbert Clare, of whom you have many times heard me speak."

"It is a happiness to me to welcome Miss Thursby under my roof, not merely for my cousin's sake, but also for her own," said the Baronet, with simple old-fashioned courtesy as he took Ethel's timidly offered hand in his. Next moment a thrill went through him from head to foot, which even extended to his finger-tips and was perceptible to Ethel, while a strangely startled look leapt into his eyes. It was as if a ghost from out the dead past had suddenly confronted him. Then he passed his hand across his eyes as if to sweep away the vision, murmuring under his breath as he did so: "No—no; I must indeed be getting into my dotage even to imagine such a thing."

He turned away with a stifled sigh. Lady Pell had observed nothing. She was gazing round the old entrance-hall, all the features of which had that half-strange, half-familiar air which inanimate things have a way of putting on when we have not seen them for a long time, more particularly when they happen to have formed the framework of some unforgettable episode in our private history.

Presently Mrs. Burton, the housekeeper, conducted the ladies to their rooms, and nothing more was seen of them till after the second dinner gong had sounded. It may be here recorded that when Ethel accompanied Lady Pell on her visit to Withington Chase, she was wholly unaware that Everard Lisle was living within half a mile of it, and that there was rarely more than one day out of the seven on which he did not spend some hours there. If the place had ever been mentioned in her hearing as that where Everard was now located, it had escaped her memory—which by no means implies that Everard himself was forgotten.

To-day, however, Lisle had not been asked to dine at the Chase, for one reason, because Mr. Kinaby, the steward, whose health had

improved during the last few days, was desirous of his help in going through certain accounts and other matters connected with his stewardship.

On entering the drawing-room the two ladies found both the Baronet and Luigi there.

"Louisa," said Sir Gilbert, "allow me to introduce to you my grandson, Lewis Clare, the only son of my late eldest son, John Alexander Clare, whom I think you met once or twice when he was a youth. Lewis—my cousin, Lady Pell." Then, a few seconds later, when her ladyship and the young man had shaken hands: "Miss Thursby—my grandson."

The young people contented themselves with a simple bow, after which they each drew back a little way. Then said Sir Gilbert aside to her ladyship: "Of course you have heard that only quite recently was I made aware of the existence of my grandson."

"It would have been impossible for me not to have heard of it. It is the talk of the county—in everybody's mouth."

"And more than one pretty version of the affair has got into circulation, I do not doubt. Some people have more imagination than they are aware of. Give them but the merest thread of fact, and they will weave out of it a tissue of romance which does credit to their inventive powers, if to nothing else."

"But is not that your own fault in some measure? The central fact of the affair, that you had found your long-lost grandson and had installed him at the Chase, was one which you had evidently no wish to conceal, even had it been in your power to do so. Why, then—But, really, I have no right to question you in the matter."

"Don't say that. Why, then, you were about to add, throw any cloak of concealment round the subordinate facts of the case? I will tell you why, my dear Louisa. Simply because, although I have chosen to acknowledge my grandson and to instal him in that position which the world—very mistakenly—regards as his by inalienable right, it by no means follows that there are not circumstances connected with the antecedents and personal history both of himself and his mother which I have no intention, if I can anyhow avoid it, of allowing to become public property. You, however, are in an altogether different position; from you I desire to have no concealments in the affair, and after dinner I will tell you all there is to tell."

It was with a curious mixture of sulkiness and gratification that Luigi took Miss Thursby in to dinner. His sulkiness arose from the fact that in the company of this beautiful girl he felt strangely bashful and out of his element; for once he was possessed by a vivid consciousness of being the very inferior creature that he really was, and it was one of those unsought conclusions which we prefer not to have forced upon us. His gratification arose from the fact that for the first time in his life he found himself in a position to treat a being in every other way so much above him, not merely as his social equal

but as his inferior ; for one of the parlour-maids who was deeply smitten with Luigi's good looks, and acted as a sort of house spy for him, had already whispered in his ear that the extremely pretty girl whom Lady Pell had brought with her was nothing more than her ladyship's companion.

Only a paid companion, and, as such, one who ought to feel herself honoured by whatever attentions the grandson of Sir Gilbert Clare might choose to pay her (for by this time Luigi had got into the way of taking himself and his position quite seriously), and yet, try as he might, he could not feel himself at home in her company. He felt altogether different when in the society of Miss Jennings, the barmaid at the *King's Head*, who, in her way, was a very pretty girl, and also a good girl. When with Miss J., as she was generally called by the young men of the billiard-room, he never felt in the slightest degree bashful, or ill at ease, and certainly never at a loss for words. Why, they two would go on "chaffing" each other for half an hour at a stretch when Miss J. happened to be in the humour and to have no other customers to claim her attention. And yet for all that, although he could not have told himself why, in his secret heart he did not wish Miss Thursby to be a bit different from what she was, for she was a revelation to him.

What on earth was he to talk to her about? he asked himself. His grandfather and Lady Pell were immersed in their recollections, and to go on sitting by Miss Thursby like a dummy was fast becoming intolerable. Evidently he must make a plunge of some kind.

"I suppose—er—that you and Lady Pell have knocked about a good deal together," at length he ventured to observe. Then seeing Ethel's look of surprise, he added hastily: "I mean that you have been great travellers, you know. I heard her ladyship say just now that something—er—put her in mind of—of something else she had seen abroad."

"I have only had the pleasure of knowing Lady Pell for about a couple of months," answered Ethel. "I believe she has been a considerable traveller in her time ; indeed, she was to have gone to France this autumn had not sickness broken out in the house of the friend whom she was about to visit." It was a relief to Luigi to find that Miss Thursby was not a travelled person, as, in that case, she might have chosen to talk about things of which he knew next to nothing, and so have made his ignorance more patent than was desirable.

"I suppose, now, that you are pretty well acquainted with London," was his next remark. He was beginning to feel more at his ease.

Ethel shook her head. "My knowledge of London is very limited indeed. I spent a fortnight there once with my aunts, but that is the only time I have been there. I was brought up in a small provincial town, and know very little of the world beyond its narrow limits."

"I hope Lady Pell intends making a long stay at the Chase," he presently ventured to remark, "as, in that case, we shall also have the pleasure of *your* society, Miss Thursby. It's precious dull here, I can tell you. My grandfather goes nowhere, and only by rare chance does a visitor find his way to the Chase. Of course one can get through the day pretty well, but the evenings are awful. Most nights grandad has his secretary fellow to play chess, or backgammon with him, and there's poor me left without a soul to talk to. It's something cruel, I can assure you."

There was quite a pathetic note in Luigi's voice as he spoke the last words. Having once begun to touch on the subject of his own imaginary grievances, he could be fluent enough.

"But no doubt you have resources within yourself, Mr. Clare, sufficient to cause the time not to hang too heavily on your hands. Books and music, for instance, and—and probably other things."

"I don't know so much about that, Miss Thursby. I'm not much of a reading man, not built that way, don't you know. And one can't be everlastingly jingling by oneself on the piano; besides, Sir Gilbert wouldn't stand it when he's deep in a game of chess. No; what I do is to get through an awful amount of yawning, mixed with a little bit of drawing, for which—the drawing, not the yawning—there are people who say I have something of a gift. All the same it's inf—uncommonly slow work, Miss Thursby, I give you my word."

"Is it asking too much to be allowed to see your drawings, Mr. Clare?" queried Ethel. "Not that I have the slightest pretension to set myself up as a critic," she made haste to add, "being all but destitute of technical knowledge, and only able to appreciate a work of art of any kind in so far as it satisfies my conceptions of the beautiful, or appeals to my sense of humour, or pathos, or teaches me something which I feel it is good for me that I should know."

Luigi felt that the conversation was getting a little beyond him, so he contented himself with saying: "Oh, my sketches are quite at your service, you know; but I give you my word that you will find them awful rubbish."

After dinner, the evening was so sunny and pleasant, that Sir Gilbert caused a couple of lounging chairs to be placed on the terrace, where he and Lady Pell stationed themselves, ostensibly to watch the sunset, but in reality that they might enjoy a *tête-à-tête* without any risk of being overheard by the young people. At dinner their talk had mostly concerned itself with reminiscences of people whom they had known when they were forty years younger.

Meanwhile, Ethel, with Luigi standing by her, his hands deep in his pockets, was going through the latter's portfolio of drawings.

"And now," said Lady Pell presently, settling herself in her chair with a comfortable conviction that she was about to listen to a most interesting recital, "and now, cousin Gilbert, for your chapter of

family romance. I confess that I am dying to hear the genuine version of the affair."

For a couple of minutes or so Sir Gilbert lay back with closed eyes, as if endeavouring to concentrate his thoughts on the task he had set himself to go through with. Then, in a low voice, slowly and hesitatingly at first, he began to tell that story with which the reader is already familiar. With some of its earlier incidents Lady Pell was acquainted; for instance, she knew that Alec Clare had left home in consequence of having quarrelled with his father about money matters, that, later on, he had settled in the United States, and there, some few years afterwards, had come to an untimely end. But the rest of Sir Gilbert's narrative, from the incident of the cutting off of the entail to his daughter-in-law's presentation of herself at the Chase, and his ultimate acknowledgment of his grandson, had for Lady Pell all the charm of novelty. She knew how much Sir Gilbert disliked being interrupted, and she listened to him in silence, but she caused him to feel that it was the silence of one who was deeply interested in all he had to tell her. Neither was she in a hurry to speak when at length he had come to an end.

Her first words were: "Thank you, cousin Gilbert." Then, after a momentary pause: "I appreciate to the full the confidence you have seen fit to repose in me, and I need scarcely tell you it will be as sacred with me as if it had been poured into the ear of a father confessor. Certainly your narrative is a most extraordinary one; but one has only to read 'The Romance of the Peerage' to discover that still stranger things, and all duly authenticated, are associated with the private histories of some of our oldest families. Still, with all due deference, I must say that in this Italian-looking grandson of yours, I am unable to find a single trait which helps to recall his father to my memory, if, indeed, poor Alec was his father."

Sir Gilbert gave vent to a little angry snort.

"Do you mean to imply, Louisa, that——"

Lady Pell laid a hand on his sleeve.

"I mean to imply nothing. I only hope that you sifted the evidence most thoroughly before bringing yourself to accept this young man as your dead son's offspring."

"What do you take me for, Louisa? There was no flaw in the evidence—none whatever."

Lady Pell tapped her teeth with her fan. "Do you know, Gilbert," she said, "that I felt quite grieved when one day in the *Times* obituary I came across a notice of the death of Mr. Page, your old adviser, whom I remember quite well. What a pity it is he did not live a few years longer."

The old man's shaggy brows came together for a moment, but that was the only notice he took.

"And this daughter-in-law of yours has gone back to Italy," continued her ladyship presently. "I should very much like to have seen her."

"You have only to extend your visit at the Chase in order to do so. I presume that Mrs. Clare will not be gone more than a month at the most."

Lady Pell shook her head. "I am only awaiting a letter from Madame de Bellecour in order to——"

At this juncture Luigi stepped out through the long window, and crossing to his grandfather, said: "Have you any objection, sir, to Miss Thursby playing the piano? If it will annoy you in the slightest degree, of course——"

"Not at all—not at all," broke in Sir Gilbert a little brusquely. "Let her play by all means. Why should it annoy me, eh?"

"Not a bit like poor Alec—not one little bit," remarked Lady Pell as if to herself; but, for a man of his years, Sir Gilbert's hearing was extraordinarily keen, and her words reached him.

His first impulse was to indulge in a little explosion, his second was to think better of it. After all, his cousin was merely enunciating a truth of which no one could be more unpleasantly conscious than he was; still, it is not always agreeable to have truths which we cannot deny, but would fain ignore, stated thus bluntly by another.

"And is it the boy's fault, Louisa, that he resembles in no way his father?" asked Sir Gilbert presently, but without any trace of irritability. "Which of us can help our looks?"

Lady Pell felt a touch of compunction. Without intending it, she had pricked her kinsman in a sore place. "Of course the young man is in no way to blame," she replied, "and it would be nonsense to impute any such meaning to my words. I could not help saying what I did because for hundreds of years back there has not been a Clare in the direct line whose features did not bear the unmistakable Clare stamp. If you dispute what I say, your own portrait gallery will suffice to convince you that I am right. But, as you are well aware, you can't dispute my dictum. Why, as far as features and expression go, you yourself are as like the Maurice Clare who fell at Marston Moor as one pea is like another. Still, as you justly observe, your grandson can in no way be held answerable for the misfortune of his looks, and if in other respects he fulfils your expectations, there's not a word more to be said."

There was a little space of silence; then, with a half sigh, Sir Gilbert said: "Between you and me, Louisa, that is just where the shoe pinches. Unfortunately, Lewis does *not* fulfil my expectations—far from it. But then, as I sometimes put it to myself, considering the way he was brought up, am I not asking more of him than I have any right to expect?"

"That certainly is a point of view which should not be lost sight of," responded her ladyship. "But what is it in particular that you complain of in him?"

"Oh, I am not complaining—nothing of the kind. I should not feel myself justified in doing so. It is simply that I am disappointed."

Then placing a hand lightly on her arm, he added : " My great fear is that I shall never succeed in making a gentleman of him."

" That would indeed be a misfortune. He would be the first Clare against whom such an allegation could be brought."

" Knowing, as I did," resumed Sir Gilbert, "(for, as far as I am aware, his mother hid nothing from me), the defects under which he laboured as regards his education and upbringing, I determined to have them remedied as far as it might be possible to do at this late time of day. Accordingly I arranged with the vicar of St. Michael's, an old Cambridge man, to do what he could in the way of introducing Lewis to some, at least, of the great writers of antiquity. Of course I knew it was too late to do much unless the boy took kindly to the vicar's teaching. I also engaged a man to give him riding lessons. Well, I waited till several weeks had gone by without making any inquiry as to the progress he was making. I did not want it to seem as if I were in anyway hurrying the boy. The other day, however, I made it my business to call both on the vicar and on Marsh, the livery-stable keeper. From both I heard the same story, reluctantly told, of incompetence and hopeless failure. 'He'll never look anything but a figure of fun on horseback, sir; he's no more nerve than a mouse,'—was Marsh's uncompromising verdict; and from the vicar I had no better a report. 'I am grieved to say that it is simply a waste of time and money to endeavour to impart even a smattering of classical knowledge to Mr. Clare,' was what he had to say to me."

" That must be excessively disheartening for you," remarked her ladyship in her most sympathetic tones.

" Disheartening indeed, Louisa; still, all that might be overlooked and forgiven him in consideration of his bringing up, but unfortunately he seems to have contracted a number of low tastes, and to be addicted to a class of company which cannot but tend to degrade him still further. Some men's weaknesses and shortcomings are accidents of their lives and are more or less curable, others seem as if they had been bred in the system and cannot be eradicated. I greatly fear that my grandson's failings belong to the latter category."

" It grieves me greatly that you should have cause to say this of one who ought to be the comfort and stay of your declining years."

" The necessity is indeed a grievous one; but it is a relief to have someone to unburden my mind to. It was not till the evening of the day before yesterday that sundry of Lewis's shortcomings were brought under my notice, of which I had hitherto been purposely kept in ignorance. It appears that Trant, my butler, has a nephew who is billiard marker at the *King's Head* hotel in Mapleford. The two had not seen each other for some months till they met the other day. Then the young man revealed to his uncle certain facts which the latter deemed it his duty at once to lay before me. It seems that on two or three afternoons in each week, presumably when his lessons are over at the vicarage, where he generally stays for luncheon,

Lewis finds his way to the billiard room in question, which at that hour of the day is frequented by a number of idle and fast young men, where he poses as the grandson of Sir Gilbert Clare, and the great man of the company, treating all who care to drink at his expense, in other words, everybody who happens to be there. Nor is that all. One revelation led to another, and a little questioning on my part elicited the fact that, for some weeks past, Lewis has been in the habit, after he was supposed to have retired for the night, of stealing out of the house by one of the back entrances and making his way to the saddle-room, where he and Snell, a groom whom I took into my service about a year ago (for I keep a couple of horses still, although I make very little use of them), are in the habit of hobnobbing together over short pipes and whisky till long after midnight. Needless to say, Snell was packed off at a moment's notice, although I hold that he was by far the less blameworthy of the two."

"This is dreadful. Have you spoken to your grandson?"

"Not yet—not yet," answered Sir Gilbert a little wearily, "I have, perhaps weakly, delayed doing so. It is not merely a question of what I ought to say to him; that is a very simple matter—but of what I ought to do, in short, of what steps it behoves me to take in order to break him of his wretched propensities at once and for ever. That he will make me all sorts of fine promises I do not doubt, but can I trust his promises? I am afraid not. At the time he may fully intend to keep them, but the moment temptation comes in his way they will be powerless to restrain him. Of late I have made it my business to study him. He puzzled me at first, but after Trant's revelation—well, well!" He was silent and sat rubbing one hand slowly and softly within the other, a look of perplexity and distress clouding his grand old features. Then after a pause he added with an unwonted quaver in his voice: "He is my grandson and I cannot cast him adrift. To do so now, to relegate him to the position from which I raised him, would merely be to put a premium on his ruin."

To this Lady Pell apparently found nothing to reply.

For the last few minutes, the sound of music had reached them from the drawing-room, but now came a burst of song, so clear, so sweet, so penetrating, that they both listened, spell-bound. Not a word passed between them till the song had come to an end. Then Sir Gilbert said: "I have not enjoyed anything so much for a long time. Miss Thursby is not only possessed of an exquisite organ, but she has been taught how to use it to the best advantage. She sings with taste, *brio* and expression. In her, Louisa, you have evidently secured a treasure."

"She's a dear, good girl—which is far better than having an exquisite organ, as you term it—and if she were my own daughter I could scarcely love her more than I do."

"The sun has set, and the evening is growing chilly; suppose we go indoors. Miss Thursby must sing to us again."

Miss Thursby was only too pleased to find that her song had afforded Sir Gilbert so much pleasure, and, at his request, she sang again and again, Luigi standing by her meanwhile and turning over her music. A spell was upon him, under the influence of which he felt as if he scarcely knew himself. Emotions and feelings were at work within him to which he had heretofore been a stranger. He caught flying gleams of something higher and better than existence had yet revealed to him. He thought of "Miss J." and scorned himself for his fatuity.

Outside on the terrace it was grey dusk. The long windows were still wide open. A single lamp had been lighted in the drawing-room, which shone on the two figures at the piano. In the semi-obscurity which shrouded the rest of the room, sat Sir Gilbert and Lady Pell, dim figures faintly outlined. Miss Thursby, at Sir Gilbert's request, was singing "Robin Adair." She had just begun the second verse when all in the room were startled by three or four piercing shrieks following quickly on each other, and evidently proceeding from someone on the terrace. Ethel stopped singing on the moment and sprang to her feet, as did Lady Pell. Sir Gilbert, with surprising agility for a man of his years, made a dash for the open window, followed more leisurely by Luigi. But scarcely had the Baronet set foot on the terrace before a female figure almost literally stumbled into his arms. So taken aback was he that he could only splutter out: "What! what! Who are you? What's amiss?"

At the sound of his voice the girl—who was none other than Bessie Ogden, the under-housemaid—started back as if she had been shot, and although she was shaking in every limb and the pallor of her face was discernible through the dusk, she contrived to bob a little curtsy. "Oh, sir," she said, "I humbly beg your pardon. I had no idea it was you I run against, but I was so frightened that I quite lost my head."

"But what was it that frightened you?" demanded Sir Gilbert, who had recognised the girl, a little impatiently.

Then Bessie, half crying and still trembling from the shock she had undergone, contrived to tell her tale. It had been her "afternoon out," and in coming back she had taken a short cut across the terrace (which she had no business to do), and when opposite the drawing-room windows had been confronted by a tall, dark, hooded figure, which had appeared suddenly from behind a clump of evergreens, and, a few seconds later, had vanished as mysteriously as it had come.

By this time Trant and Mrs. Burton, followed by the rest of the servants, had appeared on the scene, drawn thither by Bessie's shrieks.

Sir Gilbert gave vent to an impatient snort. "Here, Mrs. Burton," he said in a tone of grave displeasure, "take this idiot away and give her a good talking to. If I hear any more of this nonsense she shall be sent about her business at a moment's notice."

Lady Pell, Ethel, and Luigi were standing together just outside the window.

"It is the Grey Brother whom the girl believes she has seen."

"And who *is* the Grey Brother, Lady Pell, if I may take the liberty of asking?" queried Luigi.

Lady Pell bit her lip. She had spoken aloud without intending to do so. "The Grey Brother, Mr. Clare, is the family spectre," she said behind her fan. "But not a word of this before your grandfather, unless you wish to have your head snapped off."

(To be continued.)



ATONEMENTS.

AMONG the most picturesque scenes in history are those in which some figure stands forth before a gaping crowd, doing penance for real or perhaps imagined crime. The beautiful Jane Shore walking for her sins in a white sheet, a lighted candle in her hand, while the spectators, overcome by the sight of so much beauty and so much sorrow, weep for sympathy. Henry II. going barefoot through the city of Canterbury to cast himself before the tomb of the murdered Becket and be scourged with knotted cords. Or the proud monarch, Henry IV. of Germany, standing in the depth of winter clad in hempen shirt, head and feet uncovered, in the frozen court-yard of the Pope's castle in Rome, waiting on the pardon of the haughty prelate, Gregory VII.

But yet more appealing to the imagination is the sight of one doing voluntary penance for some wrong of which the public wots nothing, but which haunts the perpetrator with an ever-present sense of guilt. There is no use, as the proverb says, in crying over spilt milk. Yet the human mind finds a certain satisfaction in making some atonement, however fanciful and unavailing it may seem to others, for wrong committed.

Johnson was the very sport of fools when he stood in the market-place of Uttoxeter hour after hour in the pouring rain, like another Lear, save that the penance was in retribution of a filial transgression on his own part of more than half a century before, and his own tender conscience was the Nemesis that drove him to it; it being on the spot where his father's stall used to stand, to which in his youthful pride he had once refused to attend him, that the old man thus exposed himself to the inclemency of the weather and the jeers of passers-by. "In contrition I stood," he said, with touching simplicity, "and I hope the penance was expiatory."

Almost as pathetic in its way was the filial atonement of Mrs. Carlyle. Having fallen out with her mother about a reckless expenditure of cakes and candles with which kind-hearted Mrs. Welch had frivolously furnished a banquet the Carlyles were giving on coming to London, and made the poor lady weep, the remorseful Jeanie reserved two of the wax candles, bought by her mother to illuminate the festive board, to serve as her own death-lights after seven and twenty years. "A strange, beautiful, sublime and almost terrible little action," as Carlyle comments on it, "silently resolved on, and kept silent from all the earth."

The natural casuistry of the human heart, as has been observed, grants dispensations more readily than the Church of Rome. But it

is not so when one has sinned against the object of one's affections and awakes to the consciousness of it too late.

Carlyle himself who, as a rule, was more given to bewailing his own sufferings at the hands of men and gods than to regretting his shortcomings toward others, was yet seized in his turn with the pangs of unavailing penitence and the gnawing desire to atone. "They may talk as they like," he had said in his grotesque self-pitying vein, "of the pangs of remorse, but why am I, Thomas Carlyle, who have never consciously hurt anyone, suffering like Judas Iscariot?"

When, however, the revelation broke upon him, in his late years, like a flash of lightning from heaven, as Froude says, that he had sacrificed his wife's health and happiness to his absorption in his work, and been selfishly disregarding of his obligations to her, his remorse, as his biographer attests, was agonising. And in token of it, whether in conscious or unconscious imitation of Dr. Johnson, whose act of expiation had taken strong hold of his imagination, "for many years after she had left him," says Froude, "when we passed the spot in our walks where she was last seen alive, he would bare his grey head in the wind and rain—his features wrung with unavailing sorrow."

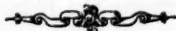
Happy they who are startled into a realisation of love's duties in time to make atonement to the living, instead of waiting till death comes to reveal to them the depth of their love. "If thou wouldst be kind to thy beloved," says the awakened Carlyle, "be kind to-day. Better to bring a gleam of sunshine on the living face than for your tears to fall like rain upon the grave."

We are all haunted at times with a perception of life's shortness, its inadequacy for the expression of an infinite love. It will come, that haunting premonition when all our loved ones are around us, and for one moment we shall faintly realise what it would be if one of our heart's dearest were laid away in death. At the most unexpected moment, in solitude, in crowds, the well-springs of our affection will be troubled. The lightest touch will suffice to stir them; the smell of a flower, the waving of a tree's thin branches in the wind, the sight of a lovely moonlit sea, a strain of music the most commonplace, but with whose notes memory's sad minor accompaniment chimes in. We may dismiss the feeling, promising it indulgence at a more convenient season. For like the witch Hugh Miller tells of, who, by her magic art, was able to defer the pain of a bodily injury to some fixed future date, so life with its endless variety, its passing interests and duties, may postpone for a season the hour of our grief. But the time of reckoning will be sure to come, when with quivering nerves and lacerated heart we shall groan, as if in bodily pain, over our love's perished opportunities.

"When God forgiveth me," says old Richard Baxter, forgetting for the moment his theology in the human yearnings of his heart, "I cannot forgive myself, especially for my rash words and deeds by

which I have seemed less tender and kind than I should have been to my near and dear relations, whose love abundantly obliged me. When such are dead, though we never differed in point of interest or any other matter, every sour, or cross, or provoking word which I gave them maketh me almost irreconcilable to myself, and tells me how repentance brought some of old to pray to the dead whom they had wronged to forgive them, in the hurry of their passion."

P. W. ROOSE.



AT THE SPRING.

TOGETHER they stand at the spring, and the water runs over her pail,
(Heyday! she is only sixteen) and the prettiest lassie in Kent :
And he scarcely more than a lad, the carpenter's grandson, Tom Gale :
And O ! they'd be married next year would her father but give his consent.

'Tis the spring of the year and their lives, and they hasten to answer
Love's call :

(Heyday! she is only sixteen) and he the best lad of them all.

Midsummer all dusty and dry, and they stand by the spring as before,
(Heyday! she is sweet seventeen) he presses her soft little hand.

"Just tell me you love me, my sweet, I have loved you three summers
and more ;"

And the pitcher he carries tips over, and the water runs out in the sand.

O 'tis summer within and without, and their hearts are both loving
and true :

(Heyday! she is sweet seventeen) and he need not have asked—for he knew.

Again they are down at the spring, and the Autumn-wind ruffles her hair—

(Heyday! she is nearly eighteen) and sorrow's first frost chills the air.

"O ! to-day I must leave you, must go, love, my fortune in London to find ;

Don't grieve for me, Mary, but take this half sixpence to keep me in mind."

And Tom and the sunshine are gone, and the tears hasten down her soft cheek :

(Heyday! she is nearly eighteen) and Jane Howick was married last week !

Cold winter is here, and the maiden goes down to the spring all alone :
(Heyday! she will soon be nineteen) a whole year has her lover been gone.

But the pitcher she carries drops down, for he stands at their tryst-place at last—

Tom himself!—and his dear arms are round her, and all the long waiting is passed.

And that laureate of Christmas, the robin, in the tree overhead sings,
"No doubt

(Heyday! she will soon be nineteen) they'll be married before the year's out!"

NORAH M'CORMICK.

I F.

BY HELEN PROTHERO LEWIS, AUTHOR OF "HOOKS OF STEEL," ETC., ETC.

"Much virtue in *if*."—*As You Like It*. Act. v. sc. iv.

"THEODORE, you must marry. I cannot allow you to moon about in this unsatisfactory way any longer. You have reached the age of thirty-five, yet here you are with no ties, no duties, no interests—no one to think of or spend your money upon save yourself. As a natural consequence you are miserable. You must take a wife."

"A wife might worry me."

"Then let her worry you. Surely anything is better than dull drifting."

"It is all very fine for you to talk, Pindar," said Theodore, in a slightly nettled tone, "but you've taken good care to steer clear of wives yourself. A bachelor of fifty hasn't much right to preach matrimony to men younger than himself—but that's the way with you parsons." Here the speaker broke off, the languor induced by an afternoon pipe triumphing over indignation. He stretched his legs a little further out, nestled his head a little deeper amidst the soft cushions of his armchair, and with an air of mild melancholy awaited the next utterance of his friend.

Mr. Theodore Vane was in one respect a much-to-be-envied person. At the age of twenty-four he had unexpectedly succeeded to an estate bringing in a clear seven thousand a year. No drawbacks accruing therefrom, not even a poor relation who could beseech a pension. An utter absence of relatives was perhaps the sole disadvantage under which his manhood suffered; there were none to control, none to direct, none even to advise with authority. So this favourite of fortune, young, rich, healthy, handsome, drifted to and fro like a spar on the sea, and none could tell what would be the end of him. A strange inability to keep long to any course was his. Everything had been tried—save matrimony—and everything had been cast aside as not worth pursuing. His last experiment had been foreign travel, and in Switzerland he had come across the Rev. Paul Pindar, Rector of St. Gabriel's, Stainbourne, Hants, a man who had visited at his father's vicarage in the old days. Mr. Pindar was of a very different type to the motiveless Theodore; nevertheless, the two became friends. The memory of the old days was a bond between; the clergyman felt that this drifting spar should be brought into harbour if possible, and that it was only right the hand of an old friend should point the way.

Theodore was now visiting his new-found friend for the first time. Host and guest formed a contrast as they sat facing each other in the bay-window of the Rectory dining-room. The clergyman was broad and athletic in figure, had strong, well-cut features, a clean-shaven face, and a marked air of distinction. At the first glance it was perceivable he was a gentleman, and when he spoke, his extremely refined utterance strengthened the conviction. Theodore was indisputably handsome; embodied in marble his profile would have been perfect, but despite blue eyes and a fine head of curling chestnut hair, a weak and somewhat peevish expression marred him as a living being. His figure too spoke of weakness; he stooped, and his general air lacked the distinction so observable in his friend.

The two had but lately returned from lunching at a house in the neighbourhood, "The Grove," occupied by Mrs. Hooker, a widow with four daughters. The four Miss Hookers were all pretty, all unmarried, and all at home. The sight of so much unwedded charm had no doubt prompted Mr. Pindar to make the foregoing remarks to his eligible friend. A short silence now fell between the pair. Theodore's last observations had touched some long silent chord in the elderly clergyman's heart; he flushed, and seemed to find it difficult to frame his reply.

"At fifty a man's life lies behind him, Theodore," he observed at length, "and I own that mine has been full of grievous mistakes. You at thirty-five can still be said to have your life before you, and I should be sorry to think that the day could ever come when you would feel as I often feel now, that the hearth is very desolate, and the heart very empty."

"Well, if it comes to that, a man can marry even at fifty. Some one the same age, you see, or possibly younger. There are always women thankful to marry anybody—at least—I don't mean that you're anybody of course——"

"I am quite aware of that, my boy," interrupted Mr. Pindar, with a good-humoured smile, "I know I'm nobody. Unfortunately a nobody of fifty who does not rejoice in a big income has not much pick and choice, and I fear I am a little fastidious where women are concerned. I cannot reasonably expect any young and charming woman to marry me; and"—here he gave a little laugh—"I don't think I could bring myself to marry an old and unattractive one."

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Theodore, roused into actual amusement. "Imagine it! Cat on the hearth, spectacles, knitting, squeaks of pain from rheumatism—not quite up to that yet, eh! Mr. Paul Pindar? Well, I suppose I am still entitled to choose from the young, but I'm so awfully afraid of choosing the wrong woman. If I could only be sure of marrying the right one, I'd marry to-morrow."

"Now attend to me, Theodore. Seriously speaking, I have shown you this afternoon as pretty, nice, well brought-up girls as can be found in any English county. All different styles, and each in her

own style admirable. Now there's Mary, the second girl, only twenty-six, a thoroughly kind-hearted, good-natured creature, full of energy and spirits, brimming over with health, and such lovely hair and complexion."

"Ah! but she's too fat. And almost too rosy. If she were thinner now, and a trifle less highly coloured."

"Then what do you say to Lizzie, the third one? A really clever girl, and most accomplished. And such vivacity. You could never feel dull with so lively a creature in the house. She has her fair share of good looks, too; no man need feel ashamed of seeing her at the head of his table."

"Yes, but she's very thin, and she talks in almost too sharp a way. If she were a trifle fatter, now, and——"

"Ah! well, there's still Daisy. She is a beauty. No man with eyes in his head can deny that. In a year or two she will be superb. But she's rather young, perhaps, only eighteen, a great gap between her and Lizzie."

"Oh yes, she's too young. Besides, she might be rude. I saw her very rude to Lizzie once this afternoon."

"Lizzie tries her a little hardly sometimes. I have personally a strong penchant for Daisy. There is a great deal of good material in the little girl. It is a little trying to her no doubt to have so many elder sisters."

"Yes," laughed Theodore, "all bent on keeping the beauty in the background until they've disposed of their own charms. I wonder that eldest one, Veronica, has never married. To my mind she is the most attractive-looking one of the lot."

"Oh, incomparably!" exclaimed Mr. Pindar, with so much energy that Theodore looked quite impressed.

"Oh, you think so too, do you?" he said, then gave himself up to silent reflection for a moment or two. "Yes," he presently went on, "a very attractive woman. A pretty name; Veronica! Veronica! sounds like Desdemona, somehow. She's a good figure—very good taste in dress I should say—and charming manner, certainly charming manner—sweet sort of face too. If only she were a bit younger now."

"Oh, she's decidedly too old for you; most unsuitable," said Mr. Pindar, getting up, and knocking the ashes rather violently out of his pipe. "She is Mrs. Hooker's step-daughter, belongs to a first family, must be quite your own age. The younger ones would suit you better than Veronica."

"I don't know that they would," said Theodore perversely. "Why shouldn't a man marry a woman his own age? You're very likely to have the same tastes, like the same things, if you're the same age. Now, when a man of thirty-five marries quite a young girl, he's seen everything and done everything, and she wants to see everything and do everything; then rows begin about seeing and doing everything,

and it all ends badly. Newspapers full of that sort of thing; read a case of that kind only the other day. I liked that girl Veronica. She looks nice on a lawn, and there is a good deal of lawn down at my place."

Mr. Pindar looked annoyed. "I am of Shakespeare's opinion," he said:

"Let still the woman take
An elder than herself: so wears she to him,
So sways she level in her husband's heart."

"I can't think why she has never married," went on Theodore, with unaffected indifference to Shakespeare; "do you happen to know?"

"I have never sought to find out Miss Hooker's private affairs," replied Mr. Pindar, rising and speaking very stiffly, "and even if I had been confided in I should not dream of making them the subject of idle discussion."

It would have been evident to most people that he was getting irritated, but Theodore was a little obtuse of perception. "One thing I noticed," he went on calmly, "she has uncommonly pretty feet. Did you ever notice her feet, Pindar?"

"I am not in the habit of noticing ladies' feet," replied Mr. Pindar a little sharply.

"Oh, you parsons!" exclaimed Theodore with an incredulous chuckle.

"Excuse me," said Mr. Pindar with an impatient movement, "but I have an hour's work I must do before dinner. Perhaps you'll take a stroll meanwhile."

"Oh, I'm all right, don't distress yourself about me. I'll have another smoke. So nice in this arm-chair with sun streaming in and bees humming outside. I'll just imagine I'm at home, with Veronica as my wife; and if it seems pleasant—— Good heavens! what a bang! Can't the man shut a door quietly after him?"

Ten days later, Mrs. Hooker gave a garden-party to which she invited all the chief families in the neighbourhood, the Rector and his friend being naturally included. There was great excitement at the Grove on the day of the event. No pains were spared to make the house and grounds look their very best, and when the girls came down ready dressed at four o'clock it was evident they had spared no pains on themselves. Mrs. Hooker looked at them with pardonable pride when she joined them on the lawn.

"You all look very nice," she said approvingly. "I don't know when you have looked so well, Mary; that new dress is most becoming. I am glad you are wearing white, Lizzie and Daisy; I do like young people in white. I'm very fond of that soft mauve dress of yours, Veronica, though it's not new. It makes you look younger than anything else you wear."

The younger girls beamed, but Veronica winced as though there were some hidden sting in her step-mother's words.

"I wonder whether Mr. Pindar and his friend will come late or early," went on Mrs. Hooker, settling her matronly form in a large garden-chair.

The girls looked embarrassed for a moment. Not one of them would have confessed it, but all had a guilty consciousness the garden-party had been given by their mother solely for the sake of Mr. Pindar's eligible friend. Mary spoke first.

"Oh, they'll come some time," she remarked, with a great assumption of carelessness.

"Really, Mary, how clever of you to know that!" exclaimed Lizzie pertly. "Was it natural intuition which led you to the knowledge or intense study of the probabilities?"

"You're both equally anxious on the subject, anyway," remarked Daisy.

"Little girls should be seen and not heard," rejoined Lizzie sharply. Daisy was ready with an equally sharp retort, but Mrs. Hooker interfered.

"Now, girls, no squabbling!" she said authoritatively. "Mary, remember Mr. Vane plays tennis with you against Mr. Paget and Lizzie, on the best court. You two had better go and see if the net is all right."

"I don't see why I should be marked off beforehand for Mr. Paget," said Lizzie, discontentedly to her sister, as they walked off to the tennis court. "Mr. Vane might be allowed to choose his own partner."

"Never mind, we shall be all playing together," remarked the good-natured Mary; "and really it is just as well to arrange everything for Mr. Vane, for he never seems able to decide anything for himself."

Mrs. Hooker next sent Daisy to rearrange the position of some chairs and rugs, and then she turned to Veronica and said—

"Don't you think Mary looks remarkably well this afternoon?"

"Yes, I do," replied Veronica, pleasantly; "blue suits her complexion so admirably. But I always admire Mary, she is so bonnie-looking."

"I think Mr. Vane decidedly admires her," went on the complacent mother; "has it struck you so? He has been here so much this last week, scarcely an afternoon that he has not strolled up."

"Yes, he has been here a good deal," said Veronica; "but so far his attentions seem to me to have been equally divided."

"I don't agree with you. The day before yesterday he showed most attention to Mary."

"And the time before that to Lizzie," remarked Veronica quietly.

"And yesterday to you, Veronica," put in Daisy, who had returned.

"Ah, that reminds me! I want to give you a little hint, Veronica," went on Mrs. Hooker, "and you are such a sensible woman, I am

sure you will take it in good part. You may not choose to allow it, but I do think Mr. Vane particularly admires Mary. And yesterday I noticed once or twice that you detained him talking when I felt sure he would have been glad of an excuse to join Mary. With your tact you could so easily have given him the chance."

"You are mistaken, mother," answered Veronica. "I am incapable of detaining a man by my side against his will. Whatever conversation Mr. Vane has had with me has been of his own seeking; and if he has at any time stayed long talking to me he has done so not from necessity, but from inclination."

There was a deep flush on Veronica's face as she spoke, but her manner was full of dignity. Mrs. Hooker looked up at the tall graceful figure standing so erect by her side, and felt a little small. Veronica was only a penniless step-daughter, often felt to be *de trop* in the house; nevertheless she compelled from the family much unwilling admiration and respect.

"Oh, my dear, I was not blaming you, or insinuating anything, of course," exclaimed Mrs. Hooker half apologetically, "only you know, you being the age you are—I mean, Mr. Vane being comparatively a young man—of course, though gentlemen always like talking to you so much—he could not regard you as—as—well, he might possibly think of Mary as a wife, and it would be such a good thing for her, you see."

"I quite see. Pray don't trouble to say more, mother," said Veronica, moving away, now looking very pale.

"I hope no one will talk to me like that when I am thirty-five!" said Daisy looking indignantly at her mother.

The remark was unheeded, for at that moment Mr. Pindar and Mr. Vane came suddenly into view. They were crossing the lawn in the direction Veronica had just taken. For a second Veronica half turned aside as though wishful to escape them, but she was given no choice in the matter. Perceiving her near, the gentlemen instantly bore down upon her. A few conventional remarks were exchanged, then the guests moved on to greet Mrs. Hooker.

"Miss Veronica does not look so nice to-day as she did yesterday," observed Theodore to his companion as they moved forward. "She looks old, has a pale, worn sort of appearance, don't you think?" He spoke in quite a disappointed tone.

Mr. Pindar made no reply. He had noticed what the younger man had failed to see: a glitter as of half-suppressed tears in the eyes of the woman who had just greeted him. And the sight had moved him deeply.

It was generally conceded afterwards that Mrs. Hooker's garden-party had been the pleasantest of the season. Mr. Pindar's was the only dissentient voice. He said he had found it spiritless and dull, and he and Theodore had almost a dispute on the point at luncheon the following day.

"I must say I thought it uncommonly well done," said Theodore, "and I don't know when I have enjoyed myself so much. Nice band, capital refreshments, and some rattling good sets of tennis. By jove, that second Hooker girl, Mary, plays well. And didn't she look nice? There were a good many pretty girls there, but not one came up to Mary, yesterday. An uncommonly handsome girl, I call her. I admired Veronica most the other day, but she looked quite faded yesterday; was dull and uninteresting too when one talked to her. Oh, she's not in it."

"Miss Hooker was not herself yesterday. She is neither dull nor uninteresting," asserted Mr. Pindar with some warmth.

"No; I think there was something wrong. She was depressed; seemed to avoid us, I fancied. Give me a girl that's always jolly. Now I should say Mary was always jolly. 'Pon my word, I think a fellow might go further and fare worse. You are always advising me to marry, Pindar; say the word now. Shall I make the plunge?"

"With Mary?"

"With Mary."

"My dear boy," exclaimed the rector jumping up and clapping his friend delightedly on the shoulder, "you couldn't take a step that would please me more. Mary is the very girl for you, and I feel strongly that you would be both a better and a happier man if you were married. Do it by all means. Take my advice, go up to the Grove and propose before another twelve hours is over your head, and my blessing and best wishes go with you." Theodore looked impressed. It was evident the Rector was genuinely pleased and absolutely sincere in all he had just said.

"You are a good fellow, Pindar," said he; "I'm glad to have your good wishes. I'll go up there this very afternoon and I'll come back engaged to Mary."

"Mary's consent is evidently a foregone conclusion," remarked Mr. Pindar with an amused smile.

Theodore laughed, a comfortable laugh, such as only a man with seven thousand a year could give on the eve of a proposal.

"Do you think this coat's good enough to go up in?" he asked, rising and surveying himself in the mirror over the mantel-piece.

"Quite," said the Rector, looking with an indulgent expression at the faultlessly cut face of his guest; "I don't think Phillida will flout you. A rosebud in the buttonhole might perhaps lend an air of sentiment—there are several in the garden."

"No, I don't think I'll wear a rosebud. Might like to ask for one up there; something to say, you know, if there's an awkward pause. I wonder if proposing is awkward? Oh, I say, Pindar, I think I'd better be off or I might change my mind."

Mr. Pindar jumped up, found Theodore's hat, presented him with it, and fairly pushed him out of the house. And so the young man started to propose to Mary.

Very late in the evening he returned. Mr. Pindar came out into the lighted hall to greet him.

"Well," he said, "good news? But I need hardly ask. A rejected man would scarcely have stayed to dinner. By-the-bye though—did you propose?"

"Oh yes, I proposed."

"Accepted?"

"Yes, accepted," replied Theodore looking very low.

Strangely enough, Mr. Pindar, usually so observant, did not notice his guest's depressed manner. He was looking very excited himself.

"That's right," he said, taking Theodore's arm and leading him into his study. "I wish you joy, my dear fellow, from the bottom of my heart. But I have not a doubt of your happiness. And now let me give you a piece of news about myself; most delightful news; I can scarcely believe in my own good fortune. You know how harassed I have heretofore been as to ways and means, with my tiny income and this poor living. You know also that a distant cousin of mine, Joseph Pindar, died the other day. Well, it seems he had quarrelled with his nearest relative, a ne'er-do-weel nephew, and just before his death he made a will and left his whole fortune to me. Fifteen hundred a year and a coal-mine that will make a rich man of me before long. What do you say to that?"

"Very glad to hear it, I'm sure. Congratulate you heartily."

"Yes, we can congratulate each other now. Quite a red-letter-day this. Let me tell you, Vane, that this money means more than mere wealth to me. It opens to me a chance of happiness which I have scarcely dared to dream of before. This desolate hearth of mine may now—but no, I will not let even my thoughts dwell on it yet. Besides, joy is making me selfish. Tell me, was the fair Mary taken by surprise?"

"It isn't Mary," remarked Theodore, sitting down languidly in an arm-chair.

"Not Mary! Then in the name of heaven who is it? Not—not—man—speak! Who is it then?"

"It is Veronica."

With a gasp the Rector fell into the arm-chair facing his guest's. "Tell me, tell me!" he said huskily; "I don't understand, I thought you went up to propose to Mary."

"So I did, but somehow she turned into Veronica."

"Explain, explain; I can't take it in."

Rather ramblingly the young man explained how the change in the young lady had come about. There was an uncomfortable silence when he had finished his narration.

"Well, don't you congratulate me?" said Theodore a little moodily.

Mr. Pindar gave a bitter laugh. "Congratulate you!" he said, "congratulate the man who has put out his hand to gather a peony,

then capriciously snaps off an exquisite lily. How about the poor lily? No, I can't congratulate you to-night; I am bewildered, unhinged. This affair of the money has unsettled me—unsettled me."

"What a funny man you are," said Theodore, looking with a puzzled expression at his friend; "you were delighted about the money a moment ago."

"Yes, but I see now it has come a little late."

"You needn't look at it in that light. A man can enjoy life even at fifty. I must say, Pindar, considering how you egged me on to do this thing, you might give me a little more sympathy."

"I never egged you on to do this thing," said Mr. Pindar sharply; "I encouraged you under the impression you meant to marry Mary."

"So I did. The only difference is that I'm going to marry Veronica. Same family, comes to much the same thing, as far as you are concerned. Anyway, it's done now, and I feel quite hurt you should take it in this manner. The whole way home I thought, 'How pleased Pindar will be.' Upon my word, I doubt if I have one sincere friend in the world."

Theodore's last words seemed to touch the Rector. With an effort he recovered his outward serenity.

"Don't think that," he said, rising and placing his hand on the younger man's shoulder. "I am, or at least I try to be, a sincere friend. I will congratulate you; I do congratulate you, most heartily. But remember one thing, Vane: you have unexpectedly come into possession of an inestimable treasure. Veronica is—is—an ideal woman."

Theodore looked much impressed, and his opinion of his newly-gained lady-love went up like a rocket.

"She is also," pursued the Rector, "a tender, delicate creature who feels acutely. If I thought you would play fast and loose with her before marriage, or give her a day's unhappiness afterwards, I would—I would kick you out of my house."

Theodore laughed at the absurd threat.

"You'll never have occasion to do that," he said. "I shall not have much time to play fast and loose, for we are to be married the end of August, only two months hence! And it will be her fault if she is not happy afterwards, for she will have her own way as much as she likes. Woodleigh Manor will have to be done up a bit. Sit down, do, and let's have a talk about it."

Mr. Pindar sat down, trying to look as if he liked it. And here we will leave them, in order to relate how it came to pass that Veronica, not Mary, was chosen to become Mrs. Vane of Woodleigh Manor.

Theodore's arrival that afternoon at the Grove had been utterly unexpected. The drawing-room into which he was shown was very disordered, and as he entered by one door he could see the tail of a white dress whisking through another, at the further end. The butler

announced his name to this tail, and Theodore had time to observe that it was both soiled and crumpled.

"Daisy, I expect," he muttered to himself; "Mary is always spick and span."

He was wrong. It was Mary escaping from visitors. She had not expected any the very day after a garden-party, and on what she considered "safe" afternoons was apt to degenerate into untidiness. To-day she was giving her hair "a rest," which meant that she had not curled her fringe, and had twisted the back hair up loosely anyhow. Also she was giving some old slippers a turn, and a soiled dress one extra wear before it went to the wash-tub. Naturally, therefore, she ran for her life when she heard a visitor coming. The door through which she escaped opened upon some steps which led down into the garden. Across the lawn she flew, and near some laurel bushes she found Veronica gathering flowers for the dinner-table.

"Oh, Veronica, do go in!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "Visitors! Had no time to see who! I am too untidy to go and entertain anybody, and mamma and the girls are out. I couldn't get tidy and do my hair under half an hour. Do go in at once. Oh! Oh! How awful! Smithson's bringing them out here to us! What an idiot the man is! Veronica! It's Mr. Vane! I should like the earth to open and swallow me up. What will he think of me? Why, I've no waistbelt! My fingers are inky. Veronica, what *shall* I do?"

"Never mind," said Veronica kindly, "very likely he will not notice. Men are never quick at taking in details. I will ask him to come round and see the flowers, and then you can escape and change your dress, and join us later."

There was no time for more. Mr. Vane was upon them. He shook hands with Veronica, glanced at her carelessly, then, as though his attention had been arrested, looked again at her lingeringly and admiringly. Veronica was never untidy. To-day she was wearing a very neat dress of softest grey; on her carefully dressed head was a picturesque garden hat; tucked into the bosom of her dress were some freshly-gathered pink and white roses, and in her hands she held a large nosegay of garden flowers. Everything about her was fresh and dainty, and she made a pretty picture as she stood before the visitor, a background of green laurel throwing into strong relief the graceful lines of her figure, and her flowers glowing brightly against the soft grey of her dress. From this pretty picture Theodore rather slowly turned to greet Mary. Alas, poor Mary! She was looking her worst. White is most charming wear for a girl, but there are two things, essential to its charm. It must be fresh, and it must be worn by a slight figure. A soiled, crumpled white gown on a stout figure is an eyesore, and so thought Mr. Vane as his eye travelled down Mary's very plump form, and rested upon and recognised the dirty skirt he had seen whisking through the doorway. Men sometimes do notice details, notwithstanding Veronica's kind assertion to the contrary, and

before Mary could get away the visitor had taken in every detail, from the uncurled fringe, to the shabby slipper. Mary was conscious of his exhaustive survey, and her cheeks burned painfully. It was unbecoming to her to get flushed. Her complexion, always brilliant, became too roseate at such times. So embarrassed did she grow she could hardly talk; her manner, her very attitude, grew constrained and awkward. It was an intense relief to her when Veronica said pleasantly:

"Mr. Vane, do come and see our conservatory; we are very proud of our flowers. By-the-bye, Mary, do you much mind telling Smithson we'll have tea on the lawn."

Mary ran away with a heart like lead. "Why, oh why, didn't I dress for visitors!" she exclaimed in the privacy of her bedroom.

Then she tore off the soiled white dress and flung it on the floor, apostrophising it as a "hateful thing." Well might she thus apostrophise it, for it had cost her seven thousand a year. Mr. Vane had made up his mind even before the objectionable dress had disappeared from view. "No, thank you," he said to himself as he strolled by Veronica's side to the conservatory. "A slovenly girl won't suit me. Fancy bringing a man friend unexpectedly into your house, and seeing your wife whisking away through doorways because she has a dirty gown on, and is too untidy to be seen!"

The conservatory proved very interesting. Veronica loved flowers, and never showed to such advantage as when amidst them. As she moved to and fro amongst the plants, daintily touching a blossom here and there, and explaining their respective characteristics and merits, Mr. Vane, who followed her closely, grew quite enamoured, and each moment thought her more and more charming. When at length she proposed a move, she found him unwilling to depart from the conservatory. Reflecting that Mary might not even yet be quite ready she settled herself for a few moments in a leaning position near the open door, still holding her flowers in her hands. An arching branch of blossoming wisteria hung over her head, her attitude was gracefully careless, and the consciousness that it was her bounden duty to entertain this young man a little longer, gave her manner a frank ease, seldom observable in her when in the presence of her mother and sisters. She talked for a little while as though enjoying herself thoroughly, then said with almost a girlish laugh:

"How remiss I am! I have been proudly showing you all our flowers, but have never offered you even a bud."

Theodore felt glad at that moment that he had not accepted the Rector's offer of a rosebud. Utterly forgetting Mary's existence, he pressed close up to Veronica's side, and looking at her very tenderly said: "Give me one of those sweet white roses in the front of your dress."

Rather shyly, for his sudden change of manner had taken her by surprise, she detached a rose and gave it him. He took it, also the

hand that offered it, and with a deep blush Veronica looked up at him. Her eyes were pretty and soft, and a blush was very becoming to her somewhat pale face. For the moment she looked a young girl.

Suddenly, before she could realise what was happening, she found herself receiving a proposal. In her confusion and astonishment her first impulse was to refuse it.

"Oh no!" she exclaimed, drawing back tremblingly, "it is impossible. You cannot think of me in that way."

This little demur on her part acted as a fillip to Theodore. His ardour increased on the spot, and so fervent did he become, and so vehemently did he press his cause, Veronica at length could not but believe his happiness hung upon her answer.

"You really love me?" she asked, looking wistfully up at him.

Theodore's answer was absolutely impassioned.

Veronica's eyes wandered out to the lawn. For years she had had an empty feeling in her heart. For years she had longed for that greatest of all good gifts, the true love of a good man. The lover of her youth had died, the lover of her womanhood had so far lived only in her dreams, but never had she pictured him like Mr. Vane. The dream-lover was older, more cultivated, a man of stronger character and finer mould. But he still lurked vaguely in dreamland, and here was a flesh and blood lover at her feet. Should she—should she not—oh should she—take him?

Round the corner came suddenly the clatter of tea-cups and the high voices of girls. Tea had appeared on the lawn, and with it the family—Veronica's step-mother and step-sisters. None of them gave her much love, all of them would be glad to have her out of the way. Here, close to her side, was the only man who had offered to take her away since the lover of her youth had died; possibly no one might ever again make to her such a proposal. If she refused this chance she might remain at the Grove—unloved, unwanted—to the end.

Again Mr. Theodore Vane pressed his suit. A quarter of an hour later he joined the tea-party on the lawn, an accepted lover.

Veronica could not face the family. She went straight to her room, and left her *fiancé* to break the news over the tea-table. He executed the task very bunglingly. For some time he could not make either mother or daughters understand, and when at last he did force the truth upon their comprehension he was quite disconcerted by the manner in which they received the news. They were at first too amazed for anything but silence, and their congratulations, when at last given, were cold in the extreme. Nothing could have been flatter. Theodore's spirits sank steadily as tea progressed; he noticed that Mary was now faultlessly attired, and looking rather pale and unusually pretty, and with a faint pang of fear he began to wonder whether, after all, he could have made a mistake. A remark Mrs. Hooker had made rankled unpleasantly in his mind.

"We can't help being surprised," she had said, "for somehow we had got into a way of regarding Veronica as quite a confirmed spinster, and you seem so young."

It annoyed him to think that anyone could speak of the girl—no, he realised he could not use the term girl—the lady he had just proposed to, as a "confirmed spinster." It meant nothing more or less than an "old maid." Just a polite way of saying "old maid." Not pleasant to hear one's *fiancée* called "an old maid," however politely it might be put.

"If only she had been a few years younger," he said to himself, looking half regretfully at the now spick-and-span Mary.

Of course he stayed to dinner. Mrs. Hooker could scarcely do less than ask him; under the circumstances, he could scarcely do less than remain. But the evening was not a success. Mrs. Hooker and the girls were dull. Veronica wore a pretty dress, but she looked pale, her manner was constrained, the frank, almost girlish gaiety, which had characterised it when alone with Theodore had left her, she was not the charming Veronica of the conservatory. Had Theodore known of the very trying moments she had gone through with the family before dinner, possibly unfavourable criticism would have changed into tender sympathy. I say possibly, for no one could prophesy the course Theodore's mind would take with any assurance.

The girls had rushed up into Veronica's room as soon as the tea hour was over.

"Well, Veronica! I never thought before that you were so deep," exclaimed Mary indignantly.

"Deep!" cried Veronica, drawing herself up a little haughtily; "I don't understand you, Mary; how have I been deep?"

"You can't deny that you kept it all very dark," said Lizzie, also indignantly. "And all the time you tried to give us to understand that you knew he preferred us—preferred Mary, I mean, and that you were doing your best to leave the coast clear for her."

"Until to-day, Lizzie, I was as ignorant as you as to what Mr. Vane's intentions might be."

"Of course she was," chimed in Daisy. "What are you accusing her like this for? Mr. Vane has unexpectedly chosen her, and there's an end to it."

"Go away, Daisy, or else hold your tongue," said Lizzie angrily.

"Shan't," said Daisy. She was the only one in the family who understood Veronica at all, and something in her step-sister's pale disturbed face made her determined to stay, and if need be, champion her on this trying occasion.

"What's this? What this?" cried Mrs. Hooker rustling into the room. "Daisy, I often hear you speaking rudely to your sisters, you should remember they are older than you are. Dear me, Veronica, Mr. Vane certainly has taken us by surprise! We should never ourselves have thought of such a match as suitable. So young a man!"

"He is exactly my own age, mother," put in Veronica, turning her face a little aside, and playing with the things on the toilet-table.

"Oh, indeed! I should never have thought that. However, it is a very good match from a pecuniary point of view, which no doubt has weighed with you."

"No," said Veronica in a low tone, "it was not the thought of his money which weighed with me."

Lizzie gave a little incredulous laugh.

"He certainly did behave at one time as if it were Mary he had a fancy for," went on Mrs. Hooker, "and I cannot understand what made him veer round to you so suddenly. I hope he knows his own mind, and will be faithful to you. You were of course quite justified in taking him at his word, for chances don't come often, once a girl has passed her youth. I really hope you may be very happy."

Then to the astonishment of the family, the usually self-contained Veronica turned upon them a face streaming with tears.

"Oh," she said passionately, "I do hope I may be happy. I do pray I may at last find love and happiness. I have longed for it so long, so very long. Can you not understand, all of you, that it is not the money, or the mere fact of marrying, but it is the home of my own—the love—that I need? Girls, have none of you one kind word for me at such a time?"

Daisy sprang forward and gave her a warm embrace, tears in her own beautiful eyes. The elder girls also came near and kissed her, and looking rather shamefaced, tried to offer hearty congratulations. They were all touched by the sight of Veronica's emotion; though selfish, they were not bad at heart. For a moment Mrs. Hooker looked half inclined to take offence.

"Really, Veronica! You talk as if we had not made you happy here," she said.

Then better feelings prevailed, and she too went up to Veronica and kissed her.

So the little scene ended better than it began. But strong emotion leaves its mark behind it, and this mark was written in pale unbecoming characters on Veronica's face when she sat down to the dinner-table by the side of her critical lover.

Late that night Daisy stole into her step-sister's room. Veronica was in bed and the room was dark.

"Veronica, are you awake?" she asked softly.

"Yes, Daisy dear; what is it?"

"I wanted to come and talk to you. I feel that we have not made you so happy here as we might have done. We, who are the real interlopers in this home. Have you done this, Veronica, to get away from us, or do you really love Mr. Vane?"

For a moment Veronica lay silent in the darkness. "Don't ask such very searching questions, Daisy dear," she said at length faintly.

"Well, let me say one thing. Don't marry Mr. Vane unless you

are sure he will make you happy. Somehow I don't feel as if he were the right man for you. In spite of his money and his handsome face, he is not good enough for you. Vera dear, if you change your mind and think you'd like to stay on here better than to marry Mr. Vane, remember one thing—and this is what I came to say: I shall always, always, be nice to you in future."

"Dear Daisy, you have seldom been anything but nice, and I shall not change my mind."

"You know, Vera," went on Daisy a little nervously as though not sure of her ground, "I have always had a sort of feeling that Mr. Pindar would like to have you for his wife."

"Mr. Pindar! I never thought of him! I do not believe he has ever thought of me, in that way. He is not a marrying man. He has always said plainly he cannot afford to marry."

"All the same, he is in love with you," said Daisy, speaking now with more confidence. "Oh, the bright eye of a Daisy is very sharp. Now, he *is* a gentleman!"

"Do you mean to imply that Mr. Vane is not?" asked Veronica uneasily.

"Oh no! of course he's one, by birth and all that. I mean—in *himself*, he can't compare with Mr. Pindar as a gentleman."

Again Veronica lay silent in the dark. She may in her heart have recognised the truth of her young sister's criticisms, but she did not choose to say so. Her silence made Daisy feel she must say nothing more either in the shape of remonstrance or suggestion. So with the versatility of youth she began to discuss the coming wedding, and dilated on the pleasure it would give her to come and stay with Veronica when she was married. The frivolous element she thus introduced did Veronica good, and made her forget for the time being some misgivings, which, unknown to everyone, she shared in common with Daisy. Her young sister left her happier than she found her.

Theodore stayed a week with Mr. Pindar in the character of an engaged man. Daily visits were paid by him to his lady-love. His behaviour during these visits was not altogether satisfactory; in fact it excited much comment from the family. With a new-born kindness, though, they forbore to make their comments in Veronica's presence. No one could have failed to observe that as a lover Theodore was variable. Sometimes he was very attentive, at others almost neglectful, devoting himself to the younger girls, as if he found the change from Veronica to them refreshing. Veronica bore this occasional neglect with a good deal of quiet dignity. It must have mortified her to find that her lover could attach himself to a sister for a whole afternoon, and almost ignore her presence, but no word expressive of mortification ever escaped her lips.

At the end of a week Theodore began to get restless, and said he must really go and see about furbishing up Woodleigh Manor for the

reception of his bride. So, escorted by Mr. Pindar, he walked up to the Grove one morning to bid them all farewell. The Hooker family came *en masse* into the drawing-room to see them, and Theodore was particularly agreeable and lively, his good spirits under the circumstances taking everyone a little by surprise. He quite monopolised the conversation, and descanted at great length on all he intended to do at Woodleigh Manor. Of course he should write to Veronica every day, and in a month's time he hoped to run up and pay her a short visit. Then when the date fixed for the marriage drew near he should come to the *Stainbourne Arms* with his best man, and Pindar, like the brick he was, had promised to put up one or two friends who might like to be present at the ceremony. So he ran on, and the family sat and smiled, and Veronica listened with burning cheeks, and seemed to find the publicity of the affair a little trying.

"We won't have a grand wedding, I think, Veronica?" remarked Theodore at length, for the first time addressing his lady-love particularly.

"Certainly not, if you prefer a quiet one," answered Veronica colouring still more deeply, and looking very embarrassed. Mr. Pindar glanced curiously at her, then turned his eyes quickly away as though the sight pained him.

"Yes, I think I prefer a quiet one. A fuss and a crowd of people detract from the solemnity of the occasion, don't you think?"

Lizzie gave a faint derisive sounding little sniff and looked at Mary, who gave a tiny but intelligent sniff in reply.

Theodore went on regardless of sniffs. "We'll have the immediate relations and friends, a nice friendly little breakfast—and away," he said importantly.

Again Veronica blushed deeply, and again Mr. Pindar just glanced at her.

Blushes became Veronica, she looked unusually pretty and young in her embarrassment. Her lover evidently thought so, for at this point he rose, and with almost an impassioned air asked her to come out with him into the garden.

We will not describe this parting scene. Suffice it to say that Theodore's fervency on the occasion amply atoned for two or three afternoons of neglect, and he left Veronica with quite a warm glow in her heart. Love was sweet, she felt, even—even if the lover were not quite the ideal lover.

"The dear girl!" exclaimed Theodore dramatically as he walked down the drive. "I could hardly tear myself away from her, Pindar. You have no idea what a hold she has taken on my heart. I feel as if I could not live through two long months without seeing her."

"I thought you intended running down to see her at the end of a month," observed Mr. Pindar, drily.

"Oh yes, of course, I forgot—so I am," said Theodore, looking a little disconcerted. "I remember now, I did say so."

"I trust your memory will serve you better when the month is up," said the Rector sharply. Then as though sorry to have spoken sharply, he hooked his arm through the younger man's and tried to discuss pleasantly with him the details of the approaching wedding.

"Keep an eye on the sweet girl, and let me know at once if she has even a finger-ache," were Theodore's last words to his friend as the train bore him away.

A month passed. Theodore wrote every day with unfailing regularity to his *fiancée*, and sent besides frequent letters to Mr. Pindar. Judging by his letters, preparations were being made on a large scale for the bride. A billiard-room was being built on to the Manor, with a smoking-room opening out of it, all to please the bride. The stables, also, were being enlarged, and two valuable hunters had been bought and were now waiting, like the bride, to be installed. Veronica did not hunt, but Theodore, having made no inquiries on the point, could not be expected to know this, so his kindness remained the same. Naturally, these extensive alterations required constant supervision, so at the end of a month he found it impossible to get away, and had to forego the promised visit to his *fiancée*. This, so he said to Veronica, gave him great grief; but, as he said to Mr. Pindar, there was so much to think of, and so much to do, he had no time for idle repining. His evenings, though, would have been very dull—this also was to Mr. Pindar—had it not been for the society of some old friends who had lately returned to the neighbourhood; Captain and Mrs. Blake, and their only child, a daughter named Celia. For two years they had been travelling for Celia's benefit, and the two years had improved Celia wonderfully. She had been charming as a school-girl, she was now lovely, quite the belle of the neighbourhood. The Blakes' little place adjoined his property. Most kind people. He could turn in there every evening if he chose, always certain of his welcome. Celia was as musical as she was lovely, quite an acquisition, would be a delightful companion for Veronica, though, of course, years younger. Had he mentioned that the intended billiard-room was to be changed into a music-room? Celia had suggested it, she was so fond of music, and he thought it a capital suggestion.

On the receipt of a letter from Theodore, the Rector usually walked up to the Grove and gave the Hookers the benefit of the news it contained, but on this occasion he departed from his usual custom and did not walk up to the Grove; neither, when he next met the family, did he mention Celia.

The alterations seemed to make slow progress, in spite of Theodore's constant supervision of labour. The wedding had to be postponed: impossible to bring the bride to a scene of such great disorder. It was now fixed for the second week in October, six weeks later than the date originally fixed. Towards the end of September Theodore in a letter to Mr. Pindar hinted at the possible necessity for a

further adjournment, but received a sharp letter from the Rector in reply.

"It does not look well when a man hangs back," the latter wrote, "and your *fiancée's* position is beginning to be a little trying. Her family were not pleased at the last postponement, and any further delay might expose her to humiliating remarks. I think, judging from a remark Daisy let fall, that they have *all* felt you might have spared a few days to Veronica, her distance from you not being great, and your time being quite your own. I am certain Veronica has felt it; she has been looking both pale and depressed. I should be sorry to think a friend of mine was behaving badly."

By return of post came Theodore's reply. It had a startling effect on the Rector. He set his teeth as he read, and his eyes glittered with a light before which Theodore, had he been present, would have paled and trembled. Thus ran the letter.

"DEAR PINDAR,—I am in a terrible mess. For mercy's sake lend me a helping hand. I cannot marry Veronica. I have no fault to find with her, but, I may as well confess the truth, I love Celia. I never meant to tell Celia, but she has found it out and has confessed she is not indifferent to me. Of course she knows nothing of this previous engagement, and I am anxious neither she nor her parents should ever know. Veronica is the difficulty. How will she take it? Will she create a scandal? Dear old friend, for the sake of old times, go up and try to arrange the matter quietly. Tell her I honour and respect her deeply, and all that sort of thing, but that my heart, in spite of all my efforts, has gone out to another. Gild the pill as much as you like, tell her I am prepared to make any money sacrifice, if that would compromise the matter."

The Rector read no further. With a fierce gesture he dashed the letter to the ground, and crushed it beneath his heel.

"The cur! The mean contemptible hound!" he exclaimed, pacing up and down his study floor like an angry lion. "No fault to find with her! with her! that angel! How dare he? Actually engaging himself to Celia, whilst Veronica, sweetest of women, waits for him, and prepares for her wedding-day. How dare he offer her his dirty money? And Celia is not to know! The dastard! Celia and her parents shall hear the whole story from me to-morrow. But Veronica! Oh heavens! how tell that long-tried, sensitive creature so vile an insult has been offered her! Why does he add to his selfish cruelty by deputing *me* to be his emissary?"

The Rector sat down on a chair against the wall, looking pale and unnerved, and began to speak to himself in short sentences, as a man in a dream.

"He asks me to go up and stab—the woman I love. The woman I love. How will she take it? How am I to soften the insult? What can I say—what say—to the woman I love? Tell her I rejoice in her escape?—the woman I love?"

Suddenly the Rector's strong hands began to tremble, and quite vacantly he gazed across the room at the wall facing him, of which he saw nothing.

"She is free!" he said, as if the thought had just occurred to him. "She is free—the woman I love."

Then he fell on his knees, and for a moment there was a sound as of weeping in the room. Only for a moment. The strong man conquered his weakness, and with characteristic promptitude prepared for action. First he dashed off a note to Theodore.

"I go," he said, "to expose you in your true colours to the Hooker family, and to congratulate Miss Hooker on her escape from so pitiful, so contemptible a creature as you. At the same time do not imagine this matter will be suffered to drop without my taking some speedy action in the matter, or that you will escape the obloquy you deserve. I need scarcely add that you will never again be suffered to dishonour my Rectory with your presence; but to-morrow I visit your neighbourhood, and unless you wish to ensure a horse-whipping, I should advise you to try change to a foreign climate for a season, and to keep out of my way."

The note finished, he took up his hat and prepared to leave for the Grove. As he crossed the hall he caught sight of the reflection of his agitated face in the mirror; he stopped and tried to compose himself.

"I wonder if this coat is good enough to go up in," he murmured, and then gave a strange little laugh, remembering Theodore had used almost the same words a few months ago when he started for the Grove—and came back engaged to Veronica. Dismissing the coat question quickly, as though ashamed so trivial a matter should occupy his mind at such a time, he stepped quickly out and strode across the garden. But all the way to the Grove six words haunted and agitated him. "And came back engaged to Veronica." He tried to escape from their haunting persistence, and to frame in his mind the words he should speak when he came face to face with Veronica, and had to break the news to her; but none that were suitable occurred to him. Never before had the self-reliant Rector felt so discomposed, so uncertain how to deal with a situation.

When he neared the Grove, he saw Daisy leaning carelessly against one of the pillars of the entrance gate, almost as if she were waiting for him to appear. As he came up she gave a glance at his agitated face, then said quickly:

"Who do you want to see?"

"Your sister—Veronica."

"Don't go to the house—she is in there," pointing to a little wood to the left. Oh, Mr. Pindar! I am so sorry for her."

"What? Does she know? Has the villain written to her?"

"Yes, and mentioned having also written to you. I felt you would come at once to help Veronica. That is why I am waiting to tell you where to find her."

"Daisy! What shall I say to her?"

Daisy looked embarrassed. "You must speak for yourself," she said, after a slight pause.

"Do they know—the others—up at the house?"

"Not yet. Telling them will be to her the bitterest part of it all. Mr. Pindar, is there—is there no one who loves her well enough to take her away from the Grove, where she is so unhappy?"

For a moment—a moment full of meaning and emotion—the girl's blue eyes met the man's dark brown ones; then with a blush Daisy fled, and without a word the Rector turned and plunged into the wood. He had not to go far. Veronica was seated on a tree stump a little way back from the narrow path which led through the wood. She rose when she saw the Rector coming, and tried to greet him naturally, but in her pale sensitive face he read, as clearly as if she had expressed it, all she was feeling and suffering. The mortification, the wounded pride, the desperate struggle to keep up a brave appearance, and save what she could of her insulted woman's dignity.

"Thank you so much for coming," she said, her eyes downcast, her mouth quivering. "He said he had asked you to come to explain, to exonerate, but I wish for no explanations, don't trouble to exonerate him——"

"Exonerate him!" exclaimed the Rector, sudden anger almost choking him for a moment. "The coward! Exonerate him!"

"Let it pass. The loss of him is nothing. He was unworthy. I felt it; in my heart I felt it all along. But—Mr. Pindar, if you will tell mother, if you will only tell mother. Spare me that. You don't know how trying it has been at home. And now, oh, now, my life will be very bitter!"

"It shall not be bitter," burst forth the Rector passionately. "Give it to me, give it to me, Veronica. Give it to me, who love you, who have loved you for years beyond everything in the world. Give me your life, Veronica. Let me take you away from this home in which you have been so unhappy, to one in which you will be adored. Come and fill my empty heart, come and brighten my loveless home—Veronica! Dearest, sweetest, loveliest, oh come away with me—with me, who love you."

No words can describe the tumult of feeling which surged up in Veronica's heart as she listened to these impassioned words. Amaze-ment, sudden deep conviction of the new lover's absolute truth and sincerity, a quick answering of love to love, intense relief and joy, succeeded each other with lightning rapidity. In two moments, as though by the stroke of an enchanter's wand, the world changed for Veronica. Here was the dream-lover of her womanhood, come at last, flesh and blood, standing close to her, absolutely satisfying, true, oh, who could doubt it, true to the core. No more bitterness, no more lovelessness, no more aching of heart. The dull cloud which year by year had been pressing lower and lower upon her had rolled

away, and the brightness of heaven seemed suddenly to stream in upon her. Her new-found, unexpected happiness did for her what insult and misery had failed to do—it broke her down. She covered her face with her delicate hands, and burst into sobbing as abandoned and uncontrollable as that of a child.

Very tenderly, almost as if she had been a child, the Rector tried to soothe her. He took her into his arms, and pressed the fair head down upon his broad breast, and let her sob there, until the over-charged heart found relief, and some measure of calmness was restored.

And all the time he spoke to her words which were as balm to the long-tried, sensitive soul.

"And now, dearest, it is your turn to speak," he said at last. "Can I, dare I hope that you will love me?"

"I think," answered Veronica in a low voice, "I think I must have loved you unknowingly all the time. I seemed to recognise you when you said you loved me; to recognise you as the one I had been longing for, as the one man in the world who could make me absolutely happy."

"Then you will be my wife, my own dearly-loved wife? You will let me take you away from the Grove—soon—soon?"

"If—if you wish it," said Veronica, again trying to hide her flushed face with her hands.

"If!" cried the Rector, gently pulling her hands away, and stooping his face over hers

There was much virtue in that "If."

EVENING.

CHILD, let me hasten on my way!
 It grows already cold and late;
 The closing of a weary day:
 I see, beyond, the golden gate.
 Why sing to me? so wondrously,
 So strangely sounds your noontide song!
 What was the word? Love?—Love! Ah me!
 I had forgotten it so long.

And yet—and yet—in days long past,
 I think the word once sounded sweet!
 But blinding mists are gathering fast—
 I go where rest the weary feet.
 The darkening path leads surely on,
 Though slower still the footsteps fall:
 The sun is set—the stars are gone—
 O child! the distant voices call.

C. E. MEETKERKE.

LETTERS FROM SOUTH AFRICA.

BY CHARLES W. Wood, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND," "IN THE LOTUS LAND," ETC., ETC.

DURBAN. *May*, 1893.

CARE AMICE,—My last letter left us sitting upon the pier at East London, in the midst of desolation, watching the storm; the wild waves that ran mountains high and sent up their spray to the skies, and the terrific winds that seemed to blow from all points of the compass at once. Seldom had we seen so grand a sight; nowhere in England; there are few spots in our little island where the ocean comes in with the strength and sweep it possesses here.

Dark and lowering clouds rolled on in heavy masses when they were not coming down in a deluge; the wind rushed past us in fearful blasts, sometimes with the roar of a cannon, as though it would shake the very foundations of the earth. Cold and cruel looked the water. Our Land of Goshen, the *Dunottar Castle*, rode at ease, unconcerned, unsympathetic. Here we spent hour after hour, unable to tear ourselves away from all this magnificence; taking refuge in some shelter when the sky opened its floodgates. On the pier were great cranes, like small towers, but unfortunately the great ships could not come up to them. Behind was the high signal box which did duty as the harbour-master's office; beyond, the little colony of Old East London, lying on the slopes, its picturesque red roofs asking for blue sky and sunshine to come and harmonise with them, and make lovely.

The harbour-master thought he saw signs of a change for the better. We saw none, but were willing to trust to his greater experience. It was some consolation to know there was a chance of getting off next morning. If we could have taken up our abode in the signal box, or in one of those homely red-roofed houses, where peace and quiet seemed to reign, we should not have minded; but the miseries of the inn were not to be thought of without a shudder.

Yet we had to go back to it occasionally, for we could not always dine with Duke Humphrey. So every now and then we found ourselves in the midst of the uncivilised crowd. The weather affected neither their spirits, appetite, nor digestion. There must have been at least sixty people imprisoned by the gale, though fortunately not all for the *Dunottar*. We grew to know every house in the town by heart, and there was nothing to repay one in the knowledge. It seemed behind the age in all its institutions. A very poor Reading-room was attended by two or three consumptive-looking men, and a few young idlers who looked as if waiting for something

to turn up in their favour—and would have long to wait. The papers were old and few. There was no life or enterprise about the place, which we compared with the admirable room at Grahamstown. Underneath was a concert-room, and as there was some sort of operatic company in the town, practising was generally going on; we scanned the old papers to the undertones of a fiery duet between a high voiced prima donna and a raging bass, both vowing eternal revenge if each was not profoundly true to the other.

No doubt we saw everything about East London in its gloomiest colours. It could scarcely be otherwise, where we had no resting-place for the sole of our foot, and felt cast adrift. We had no introductions, never having anticipated that we should spend a single hour in the benighted place. Our lady-traveller we never met again, though every time we turned a corner we looked out for her flowing garments and fairy footstep. But she wisely remained indoors during the storm. She at any rate had a fair haven of refuge, and no doubt all this time pitied us profoundly. But pity brought no relief.

At night, acting upon the harbour-master's suggestion, we went down to the port once more; beloved quarters where for a time we forgot our troubles and were happy.

He was just leaving his house and going into the perched-up signal box of an office. The little home looked warm and comfortable, a picture of domestic bliss. Cheerful lights gleamed through the windows. Upon a blind we saw the reflection of a comely female figure, no doubt the happy presiding deity of his lares and penates: for with so sensible and good-tempered a husband, she must have felt herself in an earthly paradise.

"Ah, sirs!" he cried as soon as he caught sight of us; "so you have come down again to consult the Oracle."

The very sound of his voice was a tonic, and suggested hope.

"Will the Oracle deign to respond?" we asked.

"I think silence would be wiser," he laughed. "Or if we imitated some of our English statesmen and spoke words that suited either event, we might be looked upon as a greater prophet. It is a special gift to be able to say a great deal which may mean anything or nothing."

"In a word, the wisdom of the Oracle," we returned. "But at least you have a mighty subject in the storm. To us it seems worse than ever. Where are the signs of abatement you spoke of?"

Even at the moment, a furious blast rushed past us, so that we all held on to the staircase rails. On the shore the sea was thundering and roaring; we heard the dashing and breaking of the waves, though it was too dark to see them; the outlines of the pier with its great cranes could just be traced; the lights of the *Dunottar* loomed out like earth stars, gigantic and mysterious. Above, the skies were dark and portentous; not the faintest vestige of heaven's stars to bid us take heart of grace.

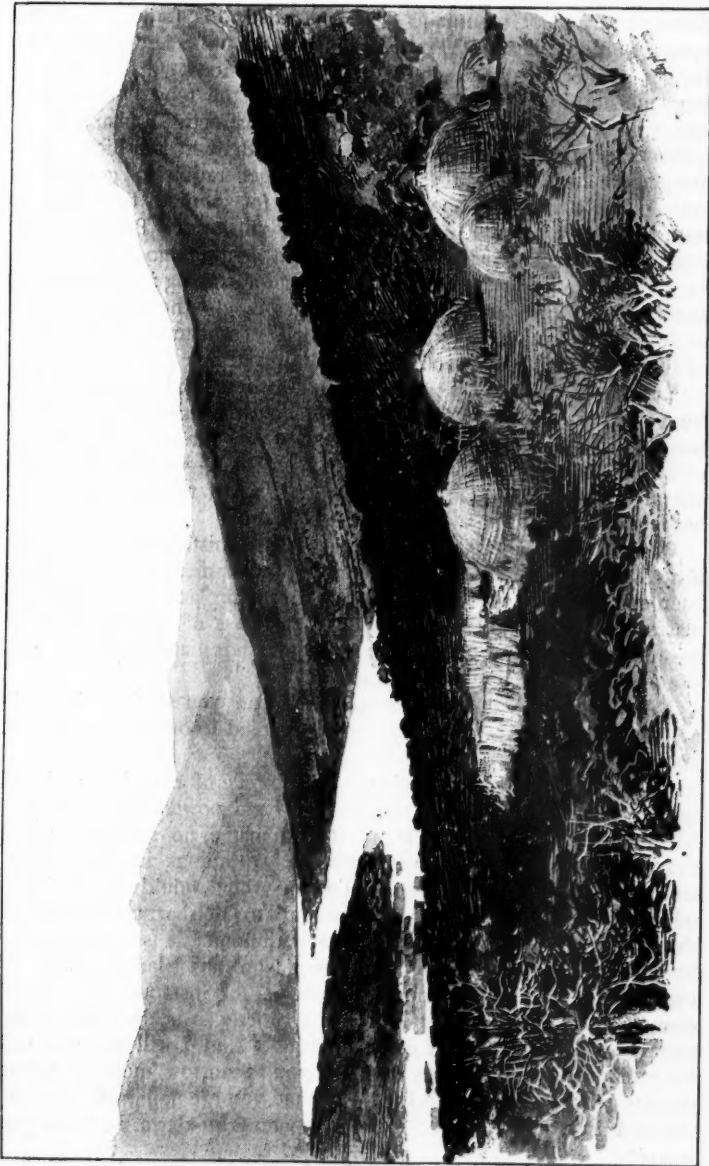
"I confess that the signs I thought I saw at midday have not borne much fruit," said the harbour-master. "I had hoped for better things before now, and they have delayed. But delays are not denials," he added, consciously or unconsciously echoing a truth in theology. "Between now and to-morrow morning much may happen. I still think you may get off. In spite of all this tearing and booming the strength of the storm is spent; it will abate if a fresh one does not spring up."

"Your experience ought to guide you, for you must have wonderful seas and gales here," said H. "Many people would almost envy your berth."

"Ay, sir! If any one knows the truth of that wonderful Psalm I think I do. Many a vessel have I seen in peril, and some I have seen go down. I hardly think any one would envy me *that* experience. There, if you like, you have a drama that sets you dreaming at night, until you start up fancying you hear the cry of men in despair, before the cruel sea swallows them up and they are seen no more. I have watched bodies cast on the beach the day after a wreck when all signs of storm and tempest have passed away, and sunshine and blue sky smile down upon a sea without a ripple, and the upturned face of the dead looks as calm and placid as it did thirty years before in its mother's arms. But in spite of all its cruelty and danger, and all its unearthly force, there is no sight to equal that of a great storm. Those fearful tornados on land that we read of, devastating whole districts in America, have only the element of destruction in them. They have none of that mighty grandeur which takes your breath and holds you spellbound, and makes you wonder if the earth will stand such repeated shocks."

Again as he spoke, a terrible blast rushed past; the sea not far off seemed to be running mountains high; we could almost feel the spray on our faces; the land appeared to tremble. As he spoke we almost fancied we saw vessels in distress out on the broad waters; heard cries for help from the drowning. It was all imagination, of course; nothing could be seen in that Egyptian darkness, and nothing could be heard above the mighty voice of the tempest. Wave after wave broke with its thunder, and blast after blast flew by on mighty wings that never grew tired and were never folded.

We were standing at the top of the long flight of steps leading to the office. One almost wondered the whole thing was not swept away, but though only of wood it was solidly built; the wind rushed through piles and pillars. Here and there in the little houses of Old East London a light glimmered from a window; it was a consolation to know there were no fishing boats without, no anxieties within: such anxious faces for instance as we have seen on the wild coast of Brittany, where in storms that sweep the coast of Penmarch and Audierne and Douarnenez, the lives of men too often go down: storms as wild, as fierce, as destructive, as this we were gazing on



ST. JOHN'S RIVER.

to-night, but without its extreme and appalling grandeur and magnificence: waves not mountains high and blasts less frantic. Yet the element off that coast of Finistère is more dramatic and tragic; the danger greater, men risk more for their livelihood. All is so picturesque and interesting, too; the simple Breton type both of men and women; costumes which give them so distinctive a character, so romantic an appearance; the annals of their daily lives, which repeat themselves from year to year and from generation to generation, with so little variation one might take it for granted that what is happening now in these primitive fishing villages of Brittany is the exact counterpart of what was going on a century ago. It will not be so much longer. Even there the change is coming; in the wildest parts of the Morbihan—sacred to Georges Sand—the whistle of the steam engine is heard, and all the charm of costume, all simplicity of life and directness of motive is fast disappearing.

But this you will say is neither here nor there, and we are wandering very far from East London and the South African Coast. What matter, if with the stroke of the pen we can return? Is not this greater magic than Indian jugglery, or hypnotism—or even the magic charm of our days in Cairo? Let us then again mount outside the harbour-master's office and survey the elements.

Whilst we have taken our flight into Finistère they have not abated. They are as wild and furious and shrieking as they have been since we first set foot in the hope-forsaken place. The harbour-master looks out into the great eternal blackness of space; seems to see things withholden from our eyes, hear sounds inaudible to our ears. We feel as if he were a little uncanny.

"Are you a sorcerer?" we suggest. "Can you see into the darkness and the future? Have you powers denied to others of which we know nothing?"

"Yes," is the startling reply; "the powers of experience always bent in a certain direction; just as you have powers denied to me. There is nothing wonderful about it; no magic, no sorcery. I can hear voices in the wind, see signs and meanings in the clouds, and read their interpretation. To you they would be as unintelligible as the handwriting on the wall to Belshazzar; but for all that I am no Daniel; my gift is not superhuman; it is shared by the humblest fisherman or coastguardsman who has tried to keep his eyes and his intelligence open. To-night, for instance, you see no change in the weather; yet I do; as distinctly as if the voice of the storm spoke to me in my own language. And I will tell you this for your consolation: if they come to you to-morrow morning before the day has well-broken, and tell you that you are going off, you may rise and dress in confidence. It will be no false alarm, as it was this morning."

"That was a barbarous proceeding," we said, "and East London deserves to be struck off the rolls for its indifferent cruelty."

"There lies a matter on which I must express no opinion," laughed the harbour-master. "I should not like to think, sir, that the next time you passed East London in the *Dunottar* I had no chance of exchanging civilities with you. If we are benighted now, as you suggest, what should we be if we were struck off the visiting list?"

"I would confine it to vessels that can enter the harbour. There must be many of the Castle Line that can do this. Or else, let East London rouse itself, and build a good hotel, and give decent accommodation to weather-bound travellers. Never were lines cast in more unpleasant places. In the time to come we shall think of East London as possessing only one place and one person: this glorious sea and harbour, with all its wild solitude and desolation; and the amiable master who rules the destinies of the port, and in a measure redeems the inhospitable impressions of the town."

"Ah, sir, you are too good," returned the harbour-master. "Would I could have done anything to lessen your discomfort. Again my tongue is tied, yet I may say that East London might do worse than follow your counsel. But the whole of South Africa, you know wants improving in this direction."

"I sincerely hope East London is at the bottom of the list—for our own sakes," we laughed. "Surely there are no deeper depths of discomfort than this?"

There was no reply, but silence sometimes gives consent. Yet it might be that we were talking to deaf ears. In his own snug little house, not many yards from us, the light shone cheerfully from the windows; the comely female figure could still be traced upon the blind, now apparently bending over some domestic needlework: marking socks with a beloved name it might be; or knitting a comforter for winter nights of storm and tempest, into every woollen stitch of which was inserted the golden thread of affection. In such a haven of refuge, what could he know of discomfort, loud neighbours, rough surroundings, noisy "bars," and dark and miserable bedrooms? What could he know of anything excepting peace and happiness and contentment, a quiet greeting twenty times a day, if twenty times a day he went to and fro? So it may be, I say, that we talked to deaf ears. We must suffer affliction before we can learn to pity the afflicted.

We left him to his work and his watching: to look out into the dark night with magic eyes that saw things invisible to us, and listen with magic ears to sounds we could not hear. Perhaps he knew something of the music of the spheres; one would suppose the voices of the elements closely allied to them.

We went on to the pier in the darkness, where the cranes loomed up like devouring monsters or levers to move the world; listened to the storm, and, dimly, saw the sea heaving and tossing in all its restlessness, the waves roll in and dash out their lives upon the shore. It was such a night as Norna of the Fitful Head would have gloried

in, selling her power to the men who came to her for a change of wind and weather.

We felt rather in jeopardy. The night was so dark that a false step might easily be taken, and once in that boiling surge there would be no turning back. So we gave it a long good-bye and returned ourselves to *terra firma*: turned as it proved for the last time.

It was a steep climb up to the town. The way was not macadamised, and the wind sent us very much where it would, but we arrived at last. The longest lane has a turning, as we said before. Here we were not anxious for the turning, which only meant misery and discomfort. As for East London, it looked very much like a bottle of champagne a week after it has been opened: very much down, and very flat and dead. The storm had left its traces. The roads had been washed away by the rains, and the very houses looked blown about; a few lights gleamed just sufficiently to enliven the darkness. Every door seemed inhospitably barred, every window was closely shuttered. Those who had homes had settled themselves comfortably for the night, to listen with a certain amount of satisfaction to the beating of the storm without, which could not affect them within. The streets were deserted; no living creature was anywhere visible; we had it all to ourselves.

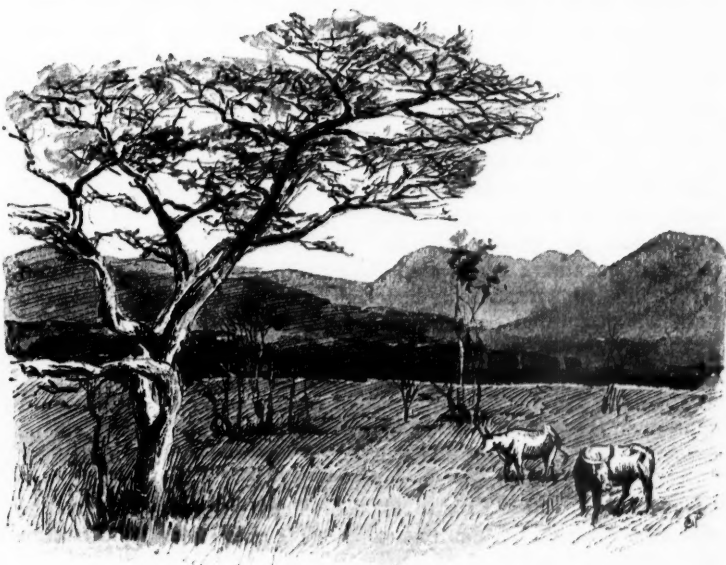
We walked up and down and to and fro until it was time to retire to our wretched rooms with some chance of sleep. From the hotel lights streamed out upon the pavement, voices came from within. People were beginning to grow tired and discontented, and quarrelsome with each other; fractious, as only children of a larger growth. The very inn-keepers seemed to have had enough of it; this unwonted crowd was not a usual experience, and the perpetual motion was wearisome: they had to run all ways at once and be in all places at the same time. In our rooms we found yet another misery; after all there was a deeper depth. Our luggage had gone down in the morning with the cavalcade of animated waxwork curiosities. It was not brought back as soon as the cavalcade returned, as there was a chance of our getting off during the day; but they undertook to see to it. This they did so well, that when we returned in the evening we found they had allowed the baggage to be locked up in the Custom House shed, the officials had gone off with the key, and we were reduced for the night to what we stood up in.

We said little. There are troubles which bring resignation with them, and this was a case in point. Mercifully, all the watching and waiting and wondering, the going to and fro all day long with no definite object in view, had proved sufficiently tiring, and before long, in spite of far-off sounds of quarrelling and conviviality—it might be either or both—we lost consciousness of outer things, and in the land of dreams happiness and a fairer world came back to us. It is not always May—but it is not always December.

The night passed, and the next morning before daylight had

come, we were aroused with the intelligence that we "were going off."

Pleasanter words we had seldom heard. Remembering the harbour-master's prophecy, we took it for granted that this was no false alarm. Presently, in the dull grey morning, cold and cheerless, everyone bound for the *Dunottar*—the whole waxwork cavalcade—had turned out. No decent breakfast had been prepared, but cups of rank coffee stood upon a table for those who could manage to take them; we could not. This time there were two "vanloads" of passengers for the vessel, and I wish I could have sketched them for your benefit: a more motley collection of antiquities and curi-



A BIT OF NATAL.

osities never was brought together: and in spite of surrounding discomfort, it was impossible not to be amused. But the horse in command of each van was wound up, the curiosities were set in motion, and in due time reached the harbour. There everyone's gaze was directed to one point; and lo, the cone was no more, and the danger signal had disappeared.

We wondered how far we had influenced the harbour-master; probably not a fraction. Yet the wind still blew great guns, and the sea still seemed to run mountains high. To us the state of things appeared little better than yesterday; but no doubt to magic eyes and ears there lay all the difference between danger and safety.

So we embarked on the small tender that had got up steam for

our benefit, and shook the dust of East London from our feet. Down the harbour, between the piers we steamed.

As we passed the little office perched high in the air, a window was opened, the harbour-master looked out, and catching sight of us in the bow of the tender, took off his hat and waved us a good-bye. We returned the salutation, and felt it was the only farewell on our part that had in it the smallest earnestness. The head was withdrawn, the window was closed; another moment and we saw the harbour-master descending the long flight of stairs towards his earthly paradise; where no doubt a table was spread with snow-white linen, and good things were prepared, and behind coffee cups sat a smiling, waiting, ministering spirit, guardian of his happiness.

We went on. Before us the sea looked formidable. It still broke upon the shore with a sound of thunder; still dashed over the pier in mighty showers of spray; the wind still blew "wintry blasts." The little tender rocked to and fro. At such moments nervousness is not one of our conditions, but we did feel a little anxious as to the result. Out there was that great black mass upon the waters, calm and serene as ever, faithful to her absentees; though had we still been weather-bound, I don't know how it would have ended. The alternative does not bear a thought. We must have done something in our desperation; taken bold refuge with the harbour-master and his Phyllis, or perseveringly knocked at every house in the suburb until we discovered our unknown lady-traveller. "There are evils that bring a pallor to every cheek and a tear to every eye:" and there are miseries that do even more than this.

The little tender began to rock to and fro and toss about like a cork upon the waves long before we had reached the mouth of the harbour. What would it be beyond?

"Gentlemen," said the steersman (no doubt the term included "ladies" also), "we shall have a bad time crossing the bar. Everyone who stays on deck will be drenched. Everyone who does not want to be drenched should go below."

Before the echo of his words had been carried away by the elements, there was a general stampede amongst the feminine passengers. Their beloved head-dresses and feathers—fearful and wonderful yet still beloved—were threatened. After such a calamity they might well cry the deluge.

Down they went in feverish haste, little screams penetrating upwards as a lurch landed one and another at the bottom more quickly than was agreeable. The men-kind followed more leisurely; and as everyone else went down, we went down too, upon the principle that one sheep follows another.

Then to our horror, the hatchway was closed and we were imprisoned in a living tomb. Had we known, not for five thousand drenchings would we have gone down. The feeling of being boxed up alive was unendurable. Come what might we were helpless.

But the thing was done, we could only stand amidst the little crowd and make no sign. The few minutes seemed hours of agony; and then we heard the hatchway opened, and the bar was passed. We were free once more. As it turned out, the good little tender had not shipped a drop of water, and no one need have gone below.

And now, tossing and tumbling, we were approaching the *Dunottar*; soon were under her very bulwarks. Never had she seemed so huge and monstrous; never had we felt such a glow of affection for her.

The manner of getting us on board was peculiar.

A huge basket, capable of holding two or three people was lowered from the *Dunottar* by means of chains, the donkey engine and a crane. Into this two of us were shut in by turns. Then we swung in the air like Mahomet's coffin, and felt very uncomfortable, very cribbed and confined. We were fastened up; could see nothing; and for all we knew might next moment be dropped into the restless riotous waves. It needed only a little failure of the basket-work, or a sudden mania on the part of the engineer, and there we should be. Where we were we could hardly tell. It has been said that the feeling of rising in the air is extremely delightful; shut up in a basket it is certainly very much the opposite. Away we went, to the sound of the clank-clank of the engine—just as one sees the huge railway boxes swinging between earth and heaven at Folkestone, then quietly dropped on to the deck of the Boulogne boat. In like manner we also soared. Then we felt ourselves swing round—a very *mal de mer* sensation—then suddenly were dropped on to something with a shake that rattled our very bones: the engineer had mistaken his distance, and was dreamily thinking of the hold, not the deck: so we reached the end of our journey far too abruptly, and had to be assisted out in a jelly-like condition. But we opened our eyes on the deck of the good ship, and a pleasanter sight never greeted unhappy travellers. The Land of Goshen at last, on which for two whole days we had fixed our hopes.

We could scarcely believe our good fortune. Nearly a week had elapsed since we stood under the shadow of those masts, and it seemed almost like a home-coming. But the delay had seriously interfered with our plans, and several things we had hoped to do and see before returning to Cape Town had now become impossible. However, much yet remained.

We had fondly hoped that the very moment the passengers were on board we should start for Durban. It is true we had not observed any getting up steam on the part of the *Dunottar*, but thought that perhaps during our absence she had invented a patent for consuming her own smoke. On getting on board, however, the outlines of East London were still to delight our eyes. The cargo for the port had not been landed and was to be landed now. So after all, we had not detained the good ship and she had not waited our pleasure.

"I don't know that you can quite say that," remarked Captain

Robinson. "Had it been a case of cargo alone, I think I should have gone on to Durban, and landed it on the return journey. We really waited for you. But having waited so long, we must now land the cargo; especially as we can do so, and still leave Durban at our appointed time. The only difference is that the spare days we should have spent pleasantly in that lovely spot we have spent uncomfortably here. But I can quite imagine that compared with you we have been in paradise."

The lighters were alongside and unloading was vigorously going forward. All day long we rocked about in the sea in most unpleasant motion. Yet to us, never were rollings more acceptable, never quarters more appreciated, never outlines more charming than those of East London rising upon the hill. Most certainly it was a case in which "distance lent enchantment to the view," if ever there was one. Almost within hail was our beloved harbour, which had indeed proved to us a haven of refuge. Above the pier rose the signal box, and beyond, on the slopes, the red roofs of the picturesque old town. All day long the lightermen went to and fro, tossing about in the rough sea, indifferent to an occasional drenching. So it went on until five o'clock, when everything was ended and the last lighter struggled back to the harbour and smooth waters.

Then there was a grand signal and excitement. The syren lifted up her voice. It was an unearthly howl, but to us Albani's sweetest notes could not have been more full of melody. We could almost fancy there was another farewell wave from the harbour-master's box, and then found ourselves in motion. The rejoicing, as the outlines of East London gradually faded and disappeared, cannot be expressed in human language.

Night soon fell and the stars came out. We were running round the coast but could see very little of it. Here and there a solitary light gleamed; here and there a fire blazed; and that was all. The gale had calmed down, the sea had returned to her wonted placidity; it seemed as though her purpose had been to detain us for nearly three days in the miseries of East London—we who had so little time to spare—and her cruel purpose accomplished, she once more smiled serenely.

The next morning we had made good way, and by mid-day might hope to reach Durban. We were still running round the coast, and in the night had passed that portion of it which is nearest to Pondoland, where the wonderful "Gates of St. John" are, and where the river empties itself into the sea. The country here as we steamed along seemed very beautiful and fertile; creeks running up into the land; many a river flowing to the ocean between richly wooded valleys; an endless succession of forests; plains backed by hills and undulations where all the fruits of the earth might be cultivated. Hour after hour passed, and still the scene remained the same; rich, and charming, and full of possibilities. One longed to



FORDING A STREAM.

land and explore, and spend weeks or months in becoming acquainted with all this wild delight ; but as that could not be, we made the most of our present experience. And then, about mid-day, the beauty culminated : we reached Durban.

Here, too, the *Dunottar* had to anchor outside. To us it was almost an advantage, for nothing could be lovelier than the scene. The sun shone, the sky was blue, and the sea was calm as a river. We had returned to summer, and intense heat. The land stretches round in great arms, leaving a wide passage admitting to a magnificent natural harbour. This might have been utilised ; quays constructed for the largest vessel afloat ; but it has never been done ; the harbour lies further up, where there is less room, and where the *Dunottar* cannot enter. Some day, when South Africa has waxed great, a new harbour will be constructed.

Nothing, we say, could be fairer than the view. In front stretched wooded heights ; great rocks rose out of the water round which the sea plashed in gentle white swirls. At the end of the point—Bluff Point—high up on the land, stood a white lighthouse, the rays of sun flashing upon its glass.

Of the town, nothing could be seen. It lies round the bend of the land, at the end of the harbour, a mile away from the landing quay. Thus we saw little beyond the natural beauty of the coast. Neither Cape Town—in spite of Table Mountain—nor Port Elizabeth, could compare with it. There was something that appealed and came home to you ; a nestling, sylvan beauty ; undulating wooded slopes, low-lying hills, and flat reaches that met the shore ; all full of charm and all accessible. The arms of the land seemed to open, as though inviting one to enter, and bask in the haven of its calm waters. So still and serene was everything, it was impossible to believe that we had lately gone through one of the worst storms within the memory of man.

We dropped anchor in the beautiful bay—if bay it can be called. But we were not alone. Not far from us was the *Conway Castle* riding at anchor, and getting up steam ; a vessel much smaller than the *Dunottar*, but in her way equally beautiful. She had been so waiting in patience ever since Wednesday morning, the time we had been due at Durban. For the *Conway* was bound for the Mauritius, for which port we had two or three passengers on board. She hailed our tardy arrival, therefore, with thanksgiving. Very lovely she looked outlined against the clear blue sky.

Scarcely had we dropped anchor before a tender was seen coming round the point and making slowly for us. This was not for the Durban, but for the Mauritius passengers, and to convey them to the *Conway*. Also to land Captain Robinson. We arranged to accompany him, thereby landing some two or three hours before the rest of the passengers. And thereby also, falling into misfortune : as you shall hear.

The little tender came alongside, and in half an hour's time the Mauritius luggage had been put on board, and our own also. For here we were to say good-bye to the *Dunottar*, not to rejoin her until we finally did so at Cape Town. It was quite a long farewell, and we should see much in the meantime.

We were soon steaming round to the *Conway*, and as we left the sides of the *Dunottar* she looked large enough to conquer the



NEAR DURBAN.

world. The water flashed all round us, sparkling in the sunshine. Brave and noble looked the *Conway*; calm and serene the skies; everything was full of promise.

We reached the *Conway*; the passengers were put on board; not *basketed*, as we had unceremoniously been at East London, but walking calmly up the gangway ladder. We were at one end of the tender, the luggage had all been placed at the other, on deck; our Durban luggage *in the hold*, as we had supposed.

There were various good-byes, good wishes, last words ; the tender fell away and steamed for the harbour. As we reached the point, we said that the *Conway* had weighed anchor, and already started on her voyage ; very soon the *Dunottar* would have the wide seas to herself.

We went to the other end of the tender. Here the Mauritius luggage had been ; here it was no more. Something in the empty look of the deck, struck us as with a presentiment sure and certain. We turned to Captain Robinson. "Our luggage has been put on board the *Conway*, and is now calmly careering towards the Mauritius. What is to be done?"

"Oh," he laughed sarcastically ; "we are not in the habit of playing such jokes—even if it were the first of April. Your luggage was of course put into the hold, and there we shall find it."

"There we shall never find it," we returned. "It has gone off to the Mauritius. I see it, as in a vision, lying on the deck." I really felt what I said, but Captain Robinson would not be convinced. To him I was merely suffering from a nervous delusion ; the result of the tropics possibly, or an overdose of East London. It was useless to say any more ; and indeed, right or wrong, what could be done?

We went round the point of the Bluff into the wide, land-locked harbour, a singularly peaceful and lovely spot. Above us, as we passed in, shone out the white lighthouse. All around were the low-lying hills and cliffs, here barren, there green and wooded ; and in the calm water they found their reflections. These heights and cliffs are a favourite spot with the people of Durban, and often echo the sounds of fun and laughter and social gatherings, in which well-filled hampers and bumpers of sparkling wines play their part. This is the true climate for open-air enjoyment. Even to-day, in brown autumn, the sun, as we steamed up into the narrower channel, was hotter than our midsummer weather. Everything was dazzlingly bright. Their own midsummer must be too hot for exertion.

We steamed up to the landing-stage and the Custom House, a long low building, beyond which a crowd of Durban carriages were waiting for hire.

It was a very lively scene. Many people were on the quay, many vessels adorned the harbour ; one of them a Castle packet steamer not too large to enter. Flags were flying in all directions, mingling their bright colours with the blue sky and the sunshine. Zulu workmen were running to and fro ; tall, strong men, looking as lively and good-tempered as if they had not a care in the world, which is probably their true condition. Give them plenty of work, use them well, do not educate them, and they are happy and contented. But teach them to read, give them the opportunity of taking in a daily paper, and they grow discontented and seditious.

In the midst of this busy scene at Durban we came to a standstill. Now to prove the truth of the vision. The hatchway was withdrawn,

the hold was searched—and our baggage was not there. Everything that we had brought away from England had gone off in the *Conway*. We had watched the inimitable Parry, our steward, pack every separate object with quite affectionate care, making his own private remarks as he did so. From the first he had taken us under his ample wing, and never was "gentleman's gentleman" truer to his duties. And now all his care and attention had gone steaming off to the Mauritius.

Has not Byron a line which runs somewhat—"That was a trying moment—when all his household gods lay scattered round him?" How much more trying when they had all gone off to the Mauritius. What a theme for Byron's genius. We literally had nothing left but what we stood up in. A trying moment indeed.

It was difficult to see what could possibly be done. Everything had gone; all our dearest objects; our small but choice library of beloved books; treasures which had been our constant companions from the days of our youth, worth their weight not in gold but in rubies; the whole of our wardrobe also, including dressing-cases, macintoshes, and all our photographic gear.

We looked at Captain Robinson in silence. It was a moment too great for words—when all our household gods lay missing. We were now on the quay. He jumped back into the tender, leaving us standing the cynosure of neighbouring eyes. It is astonishing how soon a crowd finds out what is going on around it. "Quick as lightning," cried Captain Robinson to the engineer. "Steam out again after the *Conway*."

"Ay, ay, sir," was the reply, with a smile it was not in human nature to suppress, and which said as plainly as possible: "The turtle did win the race, but if we catch up the *Conway* that old proverb will have to retire for ever into the background."

Away she steamed. "Victory or death!" called out the captain, leaving us standing on the quay, feeling as if with his departure our last chance had fallen away.

We knew it was in truth a wild-goose chase, but that eternal hope, mercifully felt in all troubles and adversities, was still there. Yet it was not much more than a forlorn hope; if they caught up the *Conway* it would be a miracle. Desperation had given rise to the chase; in great emergencies we must do something, if it is only to tear our hair, or cry for the moon.

So we waited, slightly depressed in spite of all the flags and the sunshine and the blue sky. The tender had disappeared round the bend, and presently reappeared. It was neither victory nor death.

"The *Conway* was ever so far away on the horizon," said Captain Robinson with irritating cheerfulness. "I didn't think she'd have got so far. What I hoped was that she would see us following her, and stop to ask what was wrong. But it was too late. And now what is to be done?"

What indeed?

We could at considerable expense purchase a second outfit at the stores of Durban, in which we should look as well and feel as comfortable as square men in round holes : but all our personal treasures could never be replaced.

We were about to enter one of the stylish carriages in waiting, and commence a list of things to be replaced, when a clerk of the company came up.

"I think before taking any further steps in the matter, it would be well to wait a little," he said. "I have an idea that the missing luggage will be found. It has just been reported that after the *Conway* sailed, she stopped and signalled to the tender to go round to her—which was done. We can only suppose that the mistake was discovered in time, and that it will be all right."

I must explain that a second tender had almost immediately followed the first to the *Dunottar*, to spend two or three hours alongside whilst luggage and passengers were making ready to be landed. So once more hope sprang up. A hope partially fulfilled ; for when the tender in due time arrived, half our luggage arrived with it. A Mauritius passenger had seen it lying on the deck, as the *Conway* steamed off, had noticed the name in looking up his own luggage, recognised the mistake and reported it. The vessel was at once stopped and the tender was signalled. Unfortunately only half the mistake had been discovered ; the other half had in truth gone off to the Mauritius.

But there is a silver lining to every cloud.

"I think, sir," Parry had said in packing, "that I shall put all your own and Mr. H.'s most necessary things into one portmanteau ; and what I call your luxuries or less necessary articles into the other. It will be more convenient ; and also if one portmanteau should happen to go astray, you will have the consolation of knowing that you can just manage without it."

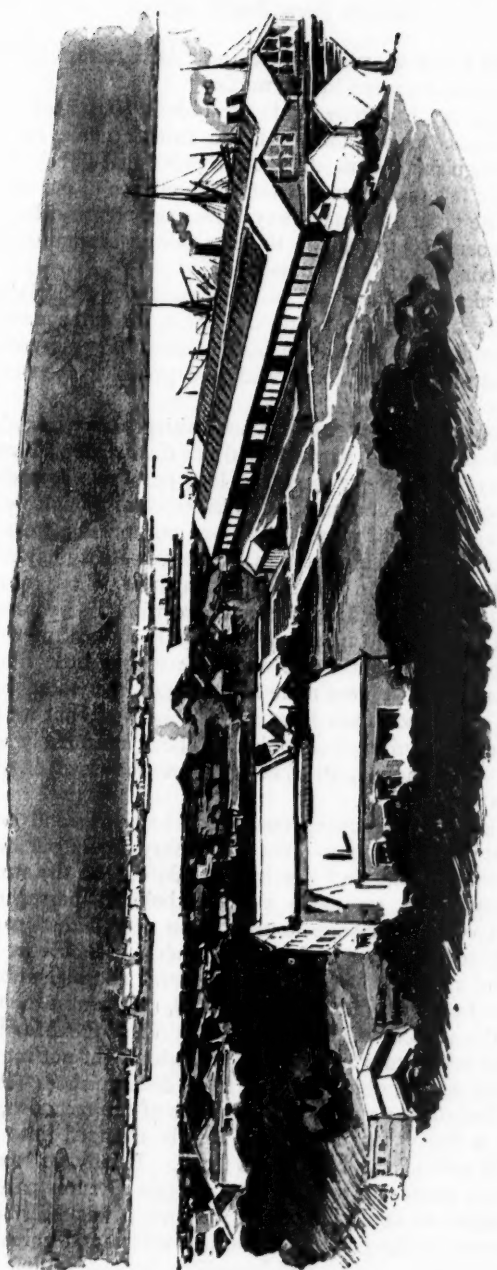
"But supposing the necessities go astray and the other remains ?" we objected.

Parry paused a moment, as if this was a new view of the matter.

"I think, sir," at length replied this delightful optimist, "that will not happen. I always myself find that no trouble is quite overwhelming. We can nearly always say : It might have been worse. Therefore if one of your portmanteaux should tumble out of a bullock waggon, or get shunted off to Kimberley instead of Johannesburg, or anything of that sort, depend upon it it will be the one you could best spare."

Parry little thought how soon his words were to come true. Was he a ministering spirit, or, in the sense that to foretell is to make happen, a malignant influence ?

(And here let me interrupt my letter to introduce for the reader's benefit what I could not at that time record, for it had not happened.



DURBAN HARBOUR.

A long article might be written upon the "Adventures of a Portmanteau," but it must be given in few words.

The missing bag had gone off in the *Conway Castle*, on its travels to the Mauritius. It was unlocked, had neither name nor address, nor any distinguishing mark upon it, to prove that it belonged to A. B. or C. We felt that there was very little chance of our ever seeing it again. The good ship made way; the weather was calm and fair; everything seemed prospering; the few passengers must have felt they were having a very good time of it.

But one night off the coast of Madagascar, in a fog, she struck upon a rock, and became a wreck. There, for some days, she remained; therefore no lives were lost. Everyone was rescued; but the good ship had to be abandoned, and presently she went to the bottom.

Weeks afterwards, we received the news with great sorrow; almost felt as if we had lost a friend, so noble had the *Conway* looked as she had steamed away from Durban waters that long past day. It made the loss of our luggage trivial and poor and insignificant, though we now felt that never again should we set eyes upon our missing treasures. If they had not gone to the bottom of the sea, at least they must now be scattered amongst the natives of Madagascar, who probably were fastening their blankets (if they wore them) with our boot-hooks, and decorating their ears and noses with our studs, and sitting in solemn assembly upon the why and the wherefore of our little library. Of the two alternatives we were more likely to get everything back from the bottom of the sea than from the fair natives; but we were not likely to receive anything from either. The "melancholy sea" as a rule keeps its treasures, whether they are the love of woman or bright gems which gleam.

Once more it is the unexpected which happens; and once more truth is stranger than fiction. We see it every day of our lives.

"Long long afterwards," not in an oak, but on the strong back of a railway porter, we again saw our beloved possession. We were in an old, picturesque house in the very fairest part of the Principality, seated at our desk near a window. Before us stretched long acres of rich and lovely undulating land adorned with magnificent trees. In the far distance, beyond all, shimmered the wonderful waters of the restless sea, blue and beautiful as the Mediterranean. An exquisite spot into which the vulgar world might not intrude.

As yet the moving object was not to be distinguished. At first we thought it looked like a stray cow from one of the meadows, that had developed a fancy for roving. Then it changed into Sindbad with the old man of the sea on his back. Finally we saw it was a railway porter carrying a portmanteau. Again a vision passed before us: long before we could identify it, we knew it was that missing bag we had last seen in Parry's hands in Durban waters, and which had gone off to the Mauritius. It seemed incredible, impossible, but was true.

Unlocked, only slightly strapped, it had travelled thousands of miles back to England. And when we opened it, not the smallest thing was missing. A few of the articles were really of value: studs for which we had a particular affection and similar objects: everything was there. After this we would never despair of anything. But Fortune has been kindly disposed towards us in such matters. A favourite pair of field glasses have been hopelessly lost thrice over. The last time they went round the world, and were travelling about for three years, unappropriated; we thought of them as buried treasures; yet they returned in the end, and we now look upon them with veneration.

And now to return to Durban and our interrupted letter.)

We had quite two hours to spare before the second tender arrived with the luggage and passengers, and deferring our shopping we took the carriage and went up to the Royal to secure rooms. Compared with what we had found at East London, we not only felt in Elysium but really are so. I must, however, enlarge upon this theme in my next letter, for I cannot do so in this.

When all was settled we went back to the harbour. The heat was intense, skies and sunshine were dazzling. We were just in time to see the tender turn the corner and steam alongside. What news, we wondered.

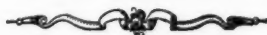
"Only *one* portmanteau," cried Captain Robinson, when it was declared; "then depend upon it the other is still on board the *Dunottar*. The *Conway* would never find out only half a mistake. But which half has come?"

"The half we could *not* do without. With a few extra things we shall now manage very well."

"And those extras must wait until to-morrow morning, by which time we shall know the best and the worst. I am glad to leave you in comfortable quarters. You will now look back upon East London as a dream of the past."

But these terrible realities do not vanish so quickly, excepting with such pachydermatous nervous systems as our gallant captain possesses.

And, as the charms of Durban cannot be introduced at the end of a letter, you must in patience wait the course of time and the development of events, remembering the old French proverb: "Tout vient à qui sait attendre:" Even that day, let us hope, when we shall meet again across the waters of the Golden Horn, and "clasp hands close and fast."



THE LADY JOAN'S SUITORS:

A MIDSUMMER-EVE'S MEDLEY.

BY MARY GRACE WIGHTWICK.

IT was Midsummer-eve. I had been in to see my friend Harding's studio, full of all sorts of delicious bits : scraps in the present, promises for the future.

But even the studio was nothing to his den, a chaos of odds and ends dealing chiefly with the past ; an old curiosity-shop, but picturesque and artistic in its arrangement. The room itself was large, and a fit setting for its contents. Square, wide-mouthed fireplace with antique andirons and old oak settle close by ; deep recesses for the dark oak buffet and cabinets, oriel window, the upper lights of stained glass which threw rich-coloured rays of tempered light upon the *bizarre* collection within. The effigy of a knight in armour filled one corner of the room ; the gleam of steel shone on the walls from every kind of warlike panoply : corselets, gauntlets *uisses*, shields, and weapons of every description. And the panels between were filled with antique portraits of those who, mayhap, had been the wearers thereof.

There was the gallant Cavalier with streaming love-locks,—a soldier of the Civil Wars—known familiarly to my friend's children as "Sir Guy." Tradition told of him that his mailed hand had been found on the battle-field after one of the First Charles's luckless fights, still grasping the Royal Standard, though his body itself had never been recovered. There was the Lady Eveline of the same period with the Vandyke hands and priceless lace. There were pages—no longer in waiting—hanging in oil and water-colours still in mute attendance as it seemed on the beauties of bygone Courts. Sweet women's faces looking out from sober coifs ; Elizabethan gallants in ruff and doublet ; and, gem of the whole gallery, Harding's pet picture of the Lady Joan Digby with her sad pathetic eyes ; she who had been sometime maid of honour to the White Rose of York. I often thought she must have had a sorrowful history.

I had always had a special fancy for the antique, and my artist friend's collection had a strange charm for me. Oliver Harding was a *connoisseur* in such things, and plumed himself upon his treasures. For a moment I was mean enough to envy him as I went back that Midsummer-eve to my commonplace snuggerly at home and lit my accustomed pipe.

While I mused dreamily as usual, and the smoke-rings curled upwards between me and my bare and dingy walls, a familiar friend looked in who was wont to keep me company at such times, and we

began discussing Harding's treasures. I don't exactly remember—perhaps the smoke stupefied me a little—but no doubt I must have offered to show him Harding's collection, for a few minutes later we both found ourselves standing upon the threshold of the artist's coveted den which I had so lately left. A great change had taken place in it since then.

I could not see anything of the master of the house, but apparently some sort of entertainment was on, for the whole room was full of light and moving figures. It could not be a dance, for the floor was strewn with rushes as was wont to be the custom in olden times. Yet apparently the guests were wearing fancy dress, for our nineteenth-century evening suit was conspicuous by its absence. The light came from torches stuck in the wall, which perhaps Harding thought more in keeping with the surroundings than gas-burners. (I hoped he was insured!) No one came to welcome us, and we felt rather out of it as we stood in the doorway looking on with rather bewildered eyes.

Presently however a Cavalier wearing a crimson sash across his shining corselet, and with bright curls falling over his shoulders, came up and accosted me.

"Noble sir! I have had a serious loss and am greatly inconvenienced," he began gravely. "It may be you can help me. Have you perchance found a hand anywhere?" He pointed to his right arm which was supported by a silken scarf, and I was horrified to perceive that the hand was missing. Surely this could be none other than Sir Guy himself!

"You will understand my dilemma, noble sir," he went on, "when I tell you that I have offered my hand and heart to the Lady Joan yonder." And he waved towards Harding's favourite possession, the portrait of a lovely girl in the quaint, straight-cut garments of the 15th century. "My heart, I need scarcely tell you, is in the right place; but alas! my *hand* is missing. How can I perform my promise?"

"My good sir," I began fussily (for I was nothing if not accurate), "the loss is vexatious of course, but the alliance you propose is, anyway, quite impossible!"

"On what grounds, sirrah!" he thundered fiercely. "Do you dare to question my choice?"

"Certainly not," I answered deprecatingly; "I also am one of the Lady Joan's humble admirers. But allow me to remind you that she was a maid of honour to the White Rose of York quite a hundred and fifty years before your time. The girl herself is all that is charming, but she is a girl of another period! You cannot join hands across the centuries!"

This unlucky remark seemed to infuriate him still further.

"Sir! you insult me!" he stammered; "I bid you defiance! My gauntlet lies upon the settle yonder; it belongs to my left hand; in fact, the only hand I have left. Master Oliver Harding picked it up

cheap at a curiosity-shop in St. Paul's ; but by St. George, when any other man picks it up I will fight him to the death."

I hastened to beg pardon for my unintentional offence, and Sir Guy calmed down again.

"My loss makes me irritable," he said sighing. "Under the circumstances it is so particularly awkward. But *Nil desperandum* is the motto of our house. I must continue my search." And he went his way gravely, eyes upon the rush-strewn floor.

I turned towards the lady of his admiration, who was bowing and smiling from her frame with eloquent eyes. A little group of men surrounded her, waiting for her notice ; nevertheless, as I advanced, she descended to meet me, which I considered a great condescension, for she had been a rich heiress in her day, and in great favour with the Queen.

"You see how I am troubled," she said sighing ; "so many suitors ! So few eligible. Sir Guy, as you know, is at present out of the question. He could not offer me a left-handed marriage. Besides, the King, my guardian, makes a point of my marrying a man of my own times. Is it not a hard condition ? Otherwise there is the brave baron yonder."

I looked, and upon one of the coloured lancet windows which I remembered noticing on either side of the fireplace saw a *glacier* knight, clad like one of Cœur de Lion's warriors, tendering his homage apparently to the lady by my side. The *glacier* element about him attached him so firmly to his post, that he had some difficulty in detaching himself to follow up his other attachment, and meantime the Lady Joan opened her heart to me.

"The baron is rich and brave," she explained ; "an admirable match ; but there are insuperable difficulties. He is Early English—our ages do not correspond. Indeed, there is no correspondence of any kind between us ; more especially as the baron cannot write. It grieves me sorely. He is tall and well-favoured, as you see ; methinks a suitor to win any girl's heart. I would fain that the baron were only up to date !"

She cast down her lovely eyes and sighed. I echoed the sigh, for I saw no way of helping her : a trifling disparity of two or three centuries is not to be got over in a moment.

"But there is always Lord Reginald," she added brightening up. "He of the white plume yonder who is trying on his ancestor's armour. He says he cannot woo me as he is or he would be an anachronism. Lord Reginald, you know, distinguished himself at the Battle of the Boyne. But now he is fitting on the harness of a namesake who fought at Bosworth Field, and if he can only get himself a little antedated——!"

She watched with clasped hands and bated breath, and my eyes followed her towards a recess where a stalwart six-foot warrior was trying to squeeze himself into the equipment of an ancestor of five

foot three. He managed the arm-pieces fairly well, and the helmet was not much of a misfit. But the corselet was quite impossible, gasp and struggle as he would.

While his lady-love looked on at his ineffectual attempts with actual tears standing in her lovely eyes, a sudden *fanfare* of trumpets startled us, and there entered a procession preceded by my friend Harding, who had turned up at last in the gorgeous costume of Richmond Herald!

Harding was followed by several officers of the Court and by some pages, *gules* and *argent*, walking backward two by two, who were strewing red and white roses before a royal personage whom my inner consciousness, and the slight knowledge of history remaining from my school days, at once told me must be Henry, the Seventh of that name. Two enormous roses, red and white, forming a gigantic buttonhole, were tucked into the front of his fur-trimmed robe, and the same Tudor emblem adorned his velvet cap. Then I remembered that the unnatural Rose Wars were ended at last, and that the rival badges, so near of kin, could blend together harmoniously once more.

I had never been so near majesty before, and was so overcome with shyness—for I didn't know Harding visited in such circles—that I almost lost consciousness.

When I recovered, his Tudor majesty seemed to be making some sort of proclamation in the measured tones of a dry and chippy voice. From the style I feel sure he had composed it himself.

"Whereas we have decreed it to be our royal pleasure that the Lady Joan Digby, maid of honour to our dear Consort, should wed a noble of her own century, and, since no acceptable suitor hath presented himself who can fulfil the conditions, we hereby ordain"—he continued in his dry royal way—"that she remain the property of our trusty and well-beloved subject Master Oliver Harding, whom we herewith appoint our Court-painter at his own expense. And as for the Lady Joan's wealth and worldly gear, now much diminished in these days of commercial failure and agricultural depression, we decree that it be lodged for safe keeping in our own royal coffers."

* * * *

I turned to sympathise with the luckless maiden condemned for so slight a cause for ever "to braid St. Catherine's tresses," but lo! she had vanished from my side and retreated humbly to her panel, whence she smiled sadly out at me immovable as ever. The *glacier* baron was once more adhering firmly to his cosy window niche. Sir Guy had vanished to pursue his fruitless search elsewhere. As I looked, the lively scene and brilliant colouring about me faded like a dissolving view, and instead there met my sight only the bare walls and meagre furniture of my smoking den at home. I was alone. My pipe had gone out, and, worse—lay at my feet shattered into fragments, like—what had been only—a Midsummer-Eve's Dream!

A GENTLEMAN.

BY ANGUS GREY.

‘ONCE for all, there can be no order in this house till O’Loughlin is banished. Disreputable, idle old creature! I hear he was drunk again last Sunday, and he has been feeding ducks in the kitchen this morning. I have no patience with such an old reprobate!’

Sir Gerald listened with his usual placidity to the dictum of his young wife, my lady Norreys, whose wealth (derived from silver mines) she had dedicated to the repair of his house’s fortunes.

“Well, O’Loughlin has lived here all his life,” he said doubtfully. “He taught me to fish and to shear a sheep when I was a little chap. I don’t think the place would look itself without him.”

“I certainly don’t want it to look itself if that condition implies its being in a constant state of dirt and disorder,” returned my lady icily. “That man respects nothing. I find he has used the strings of the old guitar that hangs in the music-room to make snares for rabbits! I believe he would take the best gilt four-post bed for a chicken perch if he had not already accommodated them with the yellow chariot in the coach-house.”

“Well, we must see about it when winter comes,” said Sir Gerald, taking refuge as usual in a policy of delay. “But his daughter Katy is a good girl, and the old fellow kept things going somehow or other all the time I was away.”

Lady Norreys sailed out of the room with a dissatisfied toss of the head. She had an orderly English mind, intensified perhaps, according to the doctrine of heredity, by the years spent by her late father in sorting his specimens of quartz from the silver mines. And she was in a hurry to get her raw Irish home arranged on the model of her late villa residence at Putney. But so far the indigenous domestics at Connoughmore had proved a barrier in her path of reform.

She went out, making ready for battle, to the walled-in three-acred garden. Its beds were bright with carnations, and snapdragons, and valerian, its plots well stacked with vegetables and fruit trees, though groundsel flourished cheerfully everywhere.

At last, in the somewhat dilapidated range of vineries, she found the culprit O’Loughlin, whose nominal post was that of gardener, though during the past years of leanness he had become a pluralist in the matter of offices. He was at this moment occupied in thinning the grapes with considerable skill. A red handkerchief was picturesquely bound about his head, and he was lilting to himself the words of a popular song:—

"Now all good boys, of hunting
And shooting, boys, beware.
If ever you go poaching
Take your gun, your dog, your mare;
For hares on lofty mountains
You'll have at your command;
And you never 'll see that lonesome place
That's called Van Dieman's Land."

"I beg your honour's pardon. I didn't feel your ladyship coming," the old man exclaimed, clambering down from the inverted box which had served him as ladder. "I just thought I might as well be sorting the grapes, or they'll be no bigger than peas, and we'll be disgraced when the English quality do be coming to see your ladyship. Sure Connoughmore used to be considered the capital of the county; an' will be so again, the Lord be praised, where we have a new missis here now."

"I am told, O'Loughlin, that you were found drunk on the roadside last Sunday," said the determined little lady, unmoved by his blandishments. "That was a disgrace to the house, and I cannot allow such things to happen."

"Well, indeed, your ladyship, it won't happen again," said the culprit, looking pathetic. "No fear of such a thing happening again. It was on the head of my grief for my father's brother, an' the Lord be praised that's what can't be again, for he's the last o' the stock. And indeed, my lady, it's very little was drank at the funeral, considering how respectable a man he was. An' there was no music at all for the boys to dance to, only whistling, out of respect for old Mrs. Noon, an' she given over an' anointed in the next house but one. But as for drink! His honour, Sir Gerald, may analyse me any day, from this to the New Year, an' he won't find e'er a drop o' whisky inside me, only an odd glass of porter to give me courage for the work. Sure it's hard for an old man like me to reach to everything, an' it's more help in the garden I'll be wanting e'er I'll be able to sow the small seeds."

Just at this moment Sir Gerald came along the strawberry-edged walk looking rather perturbed. "I have been speaking to O'Loughlin about his disgraceful conduct on Sunday," said my lady when he was within hearing. "Just look at the bruise over his eye! He is not fit to be seen in a civilised garden."

"You had better not ask him the history of that black eye," said Sir Gerald with rather a bitter smile. "Do you know that that precious scamp of a nephew of mine was at the wake, leading the rebels, and got into a row with the police. He is to be had up before the Bench next Thursday, and the chief charge against him is that of having assaulted Myles O'Loughlin. You'll have to bear witness against him, Myles."

"That, your honour, is what I'll never do agin one of your honour's family," said Myles decisively.

"But you'll have to, my good man; you'll be on your oath and in danger of being committed for perjury," cried Sir Gerald irritably.

"I was thinking of that myself, your honour, an' I took the road to Cloon last night, there I'd ask the opinion of a friend o' mine that has a great knowledge of the law. An' I have my mind made up now to what's the best way to save Master Albert," returned Myles. "Sure it's not for the like of me to be giving evidence agin the like of him."

"But how can you help it? What do you intend to do?"

"It's my intention," said Myles mysteriously, looking round as if afraid the chaffinches in the gooseberry bushes would carry tales; "it's my intention, Sir Gerald, when I'm brought into the Court, that *I won't understand the nature of an oath.*"

A hearty peal of laughter from Sir Gerald at the unexpected solution rather discomposed my lady, who had been listening with a dissatisfied air of half comprehension.

Some days passed before she had another encounter with the old man. It was close on midnight and all in the house were supposed to be asleep. But my lady was wakeful, sat up writing a letter for early post next day, and then bethought her of an almost finished novel which she might as well return to Mudie's at the same time. She took a candle and went downstairs. After some trouble she found the volume in the gun-room where her careless husband had thrown it down. Her smooth brow contracted as she noted the disorder of the room, shooting-boots lying muddy as they had been thrown there, and the shutters unclosed. "Such an invitation to burglars," she muttered, beginning to shut and bar them in proper English fashion.

But a gleam of light in the yard caught her eye. It proceeded from O'Loughlin's window, and she could see figures moving within.

Fear was unknown to Lady Norreys, and a hesitation to attack never crossed her mind. She went directly to the back door, unbolted it and walked across the yard to the lighted room. The window was uncurtained, and she had no difficulty in distinguishing the forms of James Moylan the under-keeper, one or two of the stablemen, and her own specially imported English footman. They were sitting round a table on which was displayed a bottle, some glasses, and a pack of cards. Near the hearth old O'Loughlin was kneeling at a chair. His back was turned to the company, but just at the moment when his intrepid little mistress had raised her hand to tap sharply and disperse the unlawful assembly, he looked over his shoulder and exclaimed—

"Boys, let ye go on dealin' out the cards while I say a few prayers!"

But that deal was never accomplished, and if the aves and pater-nosters were afterwards resumed it was by a more truly penitent man. The Connoughmore retainers had in getting a mistress found their master.

"O'Loughlin," said my lady one day when they were on speaking terms again, "I have determined that the breed of fowl here must be improved. The chickens are perfectly disgraceful. Their backs are like skates and their muscles like whipcord. I believe they are mismanaged from their birth. There is no reason why they should not be as well looked after here as in France, and become a mine of wealth to the peasantry. Why should they not be properly fattened and supply the London market?"

"Why not indeed," acquiesced Mr. O'Loughlin cheerfully.

"I have been studying a book on the subject," continued Lady Norreys, "and nothing can be simpler. I should like to begin at once, and have the chickens brought up under my own eye, on sweetened rice and sunflower seeds. Now how should I set about having a brood hatched with success?"

O'Loughlin scratched his corduroys meditatively. "You must borrow a hin," was his ultimatum.

"Nonsense! have we not plenty of hens of our own?" said my lady.

"There is flocks o' them. But they wouldn't have the same luck as one you'd be after borrowing?"

"Well, and what next?" asked my lady, deferring the loan question.

"You must steal some eggs," said O'Loughlin firmly.

But his mistress indignantly returned to her theoretical studies, and gave up for the moment the hope of carrying out a scheme which required such a felonious foundation.

Sir Gerald, and the ne'er-do-weel Master Albert, were walking up and down one of the garden paths, from which they could see the wooded hills beyond. Their cigar smoke invaded the atmosphere of lavender, and carnation, and mignonette. The subject was distasteful to both. Sir Gerald, impeiled by my lady's energy, found it a duty, against which his easy nature rebelled, to speak seriously to his nephew on the necessity of choosing a profession. Master Albert having no particular ambition to work while food and sport were within his daily reach, responded by asking pertinently enough what opening there was for a fellow without brains to pass a competitive examination, money to start farming with (the one idea in West Ireland for the investment of capital), or interest to secure a sinecure appointment. For the Nationalist members for the county could hardly be approached, as were the landlord nominees of old, with a request for "Government situations" for a majority of their supporters.

Both uncle and nephew were relieved by the approach of O'Loughlin, holding up in triumph a "ruffian of a rat" suspended from a steel trap.

"Well, we'll consult Myles; perhaps he can give us some new ideas," said Sir Gerald. "What would you say now, Myles, would be the best profession for a young fellow to take to in these days?"

"Profession is it?" answered Myles laying down his trophy and rubbing at his usual seat of inspiration, the leg of his corduroy breeches. "Well, there's some says one, and some says another; but I have in my mind what my grandfather used to be saying. There's three professions, says he, that you can't go wrong in. The one is to be a lawyer, for win or lose he must be paid. Or to be a doctor, for kill or cure he must be paid. An' the third is to be a priest, because heaven or hell, he must be paid too!"

And the old man, taking up the carcase of his slain foe, walked on, looking with paternal satisfaction on the fruit trees he had trained, and the vegetables he had raised this year as for sixty years past. His tall form, now a little bent, was clad in a frieze tail-coat, corduroy breeches and grey woollen stockings. A high hat, brown and fluffy, completed his costume. The red pocket-handkerchief, peeping from one of his coat-tails, occasionally did duty as head-gear, but was never put to the use for which it was manufactured.

But in his own province, the kitchen-garden, Myles O'Loughlin could challenge criticism. The frosts of spring and the blights of summer were baffled by his skill, and no peaches or pears in the county were to be compared with his.

He found my lady looking in the long vinery for some decorative plants for her drawing-room. These were not O'Loughlin's strong point, but a new innovation. He had lately indeed been in disgrace for having brought into the kitchen some samples of a collection of begonia tubers, just arrived, to be experimentally cooked.

"What are you growing this common ivy in a pot for?" she called out to him. "Goodness knows there is enough of it outside loosening the slates, and displacing the window frames of every shed in the yard."

The old man looked uneasily at the pot which had been dragged to light from a dusky corner.

"Well, I'll tell your honour no lie about it," he said apologetically. "It's Mike Cloran's sister that's goin' to her aunt in New York, an' she asked would I have any message to send to my little girl out there. An' I planted this little root in the pot three weeks ago, to let it get a grip o' the clay before it 'ud take the voyage. An' when she gets it I'll know that in whatever place she may be she won't be without a green leaf from Ireland an' a bit of Irish earth!"

His children had all left him, save one daughter, for America, the Land of Promise, but some had come back from the hard work and hard weather there, with minds more at rest for having made the "grand tour."

He had married—as is not uncommon—in his teens. But it had not been a marriage arranged in the usual way by priests and parents. A grey-eyed girl, one of the Joyce tribe, had come from her own country beyond Lough Corrib to help in the Connoughmore kitchen when the century was young. She was needed at home after a time,

and went back there. But after she had left, whispering tongues set a report going that it was by reason of young O'Loughlin she had been obliged to leave, and that she and the handsome garden lad had been too much together.

When Myles O'Loughlin first heard the slanderous rumour he struck the sneering bearer of it across the mouth. Then he took his week's wages, and next morning put on his Holyday clothes and walked straight off towards the blue hills of the Joyce country. Within a fortnight he had returned, and on Sunday he proudly brought the grey-eyed Connemara girl to mass and presented her as his bride. She made him a good wife and bore him sons and daughters; yet to the day of her death the neighbours never quite warmed to her; not looking on her as one of their own race, and she had pined a little for her own mountains.

Lady Norreys was told one morning that news had come to old O'Loughlin from America that his son was dead. Her kindness awoke and she went to look for him.

She found him sitting over the turf fire in his room smoking "a blast o' tobacco." He would have been happier doing his usual work, but respect for the distant dead made him lay down his tools for the day. He handed her the large thin sheets written by his lost son's wife telling of the end.

"Your ladyship might be so kind as to sound it out for me," he said. "I'm not rightly sure did I grip the sense of it."

She read the blurred pages aloud, and tears trickled down the lines in his hollow cheeks as he heard details of the fatal illness. "God bless her, it's well she earned him," he said at the end.

My lady offered to write an answer from his dictation. Having discovered that the "boy" had left no children and had been well-to-do, having kept a store, and also been in receipt of a pension as an ex-Federal soldier, she suggested asking the widow if there was anything to be spared for the struggling sisters at home. But the old man shook his head thoughtfully. "'Twould be well to ask her that another time," he decided. "Sure what the boy left he'd surely like his sisters to have a share of. But she cared him well, and it's fretting after him she is now, an' in this letter I b'lieve we'd better say nothing at all, only praising her."

It was some time after this that my lady, on the war-path one morning, descended by the back stairs, and from a window which looked out on the yard beheld her special hate of hates, a professional beggar with tattered garments, mysterious pack, and unshaven face. One foot was bare, the other shod with a heavy brogue. Myles O'Loughlin was in the forbidden act of dispensing hospitality to him, putting a lump of bread and of cold bacon into his receptive hands. "Mebbe I could find an old pair of brogues for you," she heard him say. "Sure the roads do be hard for a man to walk barefoot."

"My blessing an' the blessing of God be on you, an' may you be

dividing it in your own house this day ten year," cried the tramp as he pushed the food away in his sack. "But as for boots, the Lord be praised, I haven't worn but the one this twenty year. Sure it was in the famine time, an' I had great hardship, an' I did be starving many a time, an' I thought to go to the Protestant clergy where they might relieve me. An' one Sunday I watched till they wor all gone into the church in Oughtamara, an' I went up the steps for to go in, an' I put my right foot across the threshold. An' then the thought o' the priest an' of Purgatory came before me, an' that the blessed saints 'ud intercede for me no more. So out I came again, no richer than I went in. But the foot that was so forward to go in among the jumpers, I gave it cruelty ever since, and sorra boot or shoe will I put on it till the day I die."

O'Loughlin listened approvingly and stood his ground when my lady's sudden descent put the itinerant martyr to flight.

"O'Loughlin," she said severely, "I have already told you that giving to beggars is against the rules of this establishment. The public rates provide for their exemption from starvation, and once for all, those who encourage them on the premises may look forward within measurable time of themselves joining their ranks."

Old Myles listened deferentially.

"Your ladyship knows best," he said. "An' it's not for the likes of me to set up an opinion against the likes of yourself. It's little profit they are, them tramps, walking the country, an' no benefit of them wherever they go. But there's a thing in my mind makes me be charitable in spite of all. One time when I was but a little gossoon I was in Galway at a fair along with my father. An' I went into a shop where he gave me a penny for myself for to buy a few crackers. An' while I was eating them within, for the day was soft an' I thought to keep myself in shelter while I could, in came a red-haired woman an' rattled her stick on the counter an', 'Gimme a copper, ma'am,' says she, 'for the honour o' God.' With that the decent woman that kept the shop handed her a penny an' a bit o' sweet cake, and away with her with sorra much thanks. 'I wonder at you, ma'am, to be so ready,' says a farming man that was just after buying a loaf o' white bread. 'Sure, that's none of our own people, but a stranger from the South. It's best to keep our charity for them that wants it at home.' 'That's so,' says she, 'an' I don't like the looks o' that one much, but what can I do? Sure,' says she, her eyes shining like the stars, 'I dare not refuse any, lest wan might be the Christ.' An' she made the sign of the Cross, an' the farming man, he says no more."

O'Loughlin had taken his hat off and looked upwards. Neither did my lady say any more, but opportunely retreated at the sound of the breakfast bell.

With autumn days came a cloud on the Connoughmore estate; a girl, a widow's daughter with the face of Burne Jones's "Beggar Maid," had got into trouble and a child was born. The stain on the

morality of the parish was felt to be a deep one, so unusual is such a scandal. The little roadside cabin of the widow might have belonged to the family of a land-grabber, or of a policeman killed on duty, so completely was it avoided and its inmates shunned.

Lady Norreys heard pityingly of this, and sent, by the doctor, food and money. He came to tell her of the gratitude her help had called forth, and how sorely it had been needed. The old mother was too infirm to go out, and during the unhappy girl's illness they would have been quite destitute but for the merciful succour of one neighbour. Old O'Loughlin had every evening faced public opinion and a tiring walk after his day's work, and had carried them milk and other comforts.

Lady Norreys was touched and pleased, and mentally forgave the old man his latest crime, that of having stuck a candle in the button-hole of the new coachman's livery coat, which hung conveniently on the harness-room door at a time when he wanted a light, and his candlestick had "gone astray."

When she met him she said, in a gentler tone than he had yet heard her use—

"I am glad to hear, O'Loughlin, that you showed some pity to that poor girl when everyone else had deserted her."

"Well, your ladyship," said the old man with quiet solemnity, "she brought disgrace on the property sure enough, an' you couldn't blame the neighbours to be angry. But I had a feel within me that if our Lord Jesus was back on earth, it's what He would have done Himself, to go and help her."

But the autumn leaves were still falling, and the dahlias flaunting their purple and gold in defiance of coming frosts, when the old gardener had to give up his daily round of so many years. He caught a chill and had to stay indoors. It seemed as if his lately-lost son was beckoning him to the unseen country, for his hold on life appeared suddenly to be loosened.

My lady, half surprised at her own anxiety, visited and brought the doctor to him constantly, but she saw that his strength was ebbing away. She was looking through a book on invalid cookery one afternoon, when a message came, asking if she would come and see the old man. A little surprised, for she had spent much of the morning with him, she hastened downstairs.

"Not that way, my lady, he's out in the yard," said one of the servants who was watching for her.

"In the yard! nonsense," she exclaimed.

But she was quite unprepared for the sight that met her eyes outside. A common cart with rough unpainted shafts stood there. A feather bed had been laid upon it, with a few bundles and some hay. On the bed, his head supported on his daughter's knee, lay Myles O'Loughlin. His frieze coat was half covered by a blanket, and the old red handkerchief crowned his pallid face. His wasted bony hands lay on the coverlet, grasping at it as if for support.

Lady Norreys was shocked at the apparition of the dying man in the cold daylight.

"What does this mean?" she asked Katy, indignantly. "How could you allow your father to leave his bed?"

"Sure, 'twas himself that done it," answered the girl weeping, "and all Connaught wouldn't have held him. It's afraid he was of being a trouble to the family."

"That's so," said the old man huskily, trying to raise his head. "Saving your ladyship's presence, the doctor said, 'O'Loughlin,' says he, 'I'm afear'd you're swept.' 'If that's so, doctor,' says I, 'tell me how much time have I before me.' 'Well, I'll hardly promise you to see Sunday next,' says he, 'but don't fret yourself, you'll die fair an' aisy, and you'll have a good burial, for there's not a man in the four parishes that's more respected than yourself.' 'Sorra fret, doctor,' says I, 'God is good, an' my little girl that died is praying for me in heaven this ten year.' An' when he was gone out the door I called to Katy an' bid her get the cart ready an' put the clothes on me, for, says I, I never'll stop to be a trouble to the English lady; I'll go die in the house of my first cousin John O'Hagan, where they won't mind me being in the house at all."

His voice had sunk to a whisper. Lady Norreys, tears in her eyes, came closer and took his worn hand.

"You must not go away, Myles," she said. "Stay here, and we will all do our best to cure you."

He shook his head feebly. "God bless you, my lady; if care could cure me, it's well you earned me; but no man or woman can do that for me now. An' I'd be loath to be troublesome at the last, for your ladyship is strange to the ways of the country; an' there'll be the wake, an' after that the burial, an' maybe some of the boys might be taking a drop too much, an' rising too much noise or the like! No, ma'am; I'm better away, an' sure it's all on the road to the Abbey, where the best man o' my family is buried."

With feeble stateliness he signed for the cart to move on, and shut his eyes resolutely that they might betray no sign of suffering, as his rough and jolting chariot bore him away to the unknown.

* * * *

A month later, on one of the mild and spring-like days which November brings to the West, Lady Norreys and the "English quality," her guests, set out on an expedition.

They drove through many miles of the wind-swept and rock-strewn country that lies between Connoughmore and the Atlantic. A long and desolate drive, but at last they reached their goal, an old abbey in the Barren Hills. Its ruined walls and grey pillars looked as if hewn out of the stony mountain that surrounds it. Exquisitely carved capitals reproduce the form of the harebells, which in summer-time add a touch of blue to the universal grey. One of the visitors had wished to see these, and to study the architecture of a ruin "so

lightly, delicately built" in the midst of such a wild and savage scene.

Lady Norreys, however, had another reason for making the long pilgrimage. There was now a very soft spot in her heart for the old man who had gone away to die that his death might be "no trouble to the English lady." She was anxious that a slab should mark his resting-place and tell of his long and faithful service. She wished to see if the place where he was laid could lend any suggestion as to its design.

With the help of her nephew Albert, still one of the unemployed, she found the newly-made grave. She stood by it, a touch of remorse sharpening her regret as she thought of the promise she had extorted that this winter should end his service in her husband's house. Close by, in a recess of the lichened wall, she noticed a recumbent figure carved roughly in the grey limestone. The features were almost worn away, but there was something of dignity in the stone pillowed head and tunic-clad figure lying undisturbed in that silent rock-bound wilderness. The words underneath were legible, "O'Loughlin, King of Barren." She stood and mused for a time beside it, an irritating flash of memory bringing before her a richly decorated monument at Putney to a late eminent owner of silver mines.

"So this is 'the best man of his family,'" she murmured to herself. "I had found out long ago that he was one of Nature's gentlemen, but I think they might have told me that he was descended from a king."

SPRING.

"And in green underwood and cover blossom by blossom the spring begins."

SPRING! and the grass takes on its tend'rest hue;

All the birds sing, "Winter is gone, is gone;"

And never, surely, has the sun so shone,

Urging the trees to burst to leaf anew.

O Spring! these lovely buds are thine which strew

These quiet mossy places—all thine own

That lark's inspired love-lyric: thine alone

The wind-swept sky's unspeakable pale blue.

O Spring! thy spirit is the glorious word

Which we can only guess at here below,

For eye hath never seen nor ear hath heard

The things which those who share it see and know.

Yet, as at first in Eden, every tree

And grass-blade breathes of Immortality.

NORAH M'CORMICK.

JUNCTION JACK.

THERE was a stir in the camp at Niger's Creek, and some five or six men were busy with their arms and the accoutrements of their horses in preparation for a couple of days' hard riding. It was the habit of the camp to turn out to see the start, no matter whether the expedition were of limited or of general interest. In the present case it was certainly a secret, and probably a desperate one, its object being unknown to the community in general, and round about the busy centre of shouting men and plunging horses lounged knots of the "boys," mostly in shirt-sleeves, and in their customary unshaven and unkempt condition, puffing at short pipes and criticising audibly the points of men and animals during the various stages of preparation.

The little band of five or six men comprised the desperadoes of Niger's Creek—what community is there which does not number a few amongst its members?

Fortune had dealt hardly with the camp of late. Not for many months had the winning card turned up for a single member, and the men were simply at their wits' end and ready for almost any deed of daring. By a strange combination of circumstances, which it is not necessary to relate here, a piece of intelligence of the kind usually kept a profound secret had come to the ears of one of the men. The mail train of the D—— and R—— run on Thursday night was to carry specie to a large amount. At a certain point the mail overtook a freight train which had to be switched off to a siding running for some distance beside the level; this junction was in the keeping of a single man.

Now Niger's Creek was just in the mood to carry out the most villainous plot ever conceived.

They were agreed that to let such a chance slip in the present state of affairs would be suicidal; they therefore resolved that in order to gain possession of this rich prize, which would float them and set them on their legs again, the simplest and the easiest plan would be to wreck the mail train by permitting it to collide with the other at the junction, and in the confusion, when all attention would no doubt be centered on the injured passengers, to make off with the booty.

To do this safely "Junction Jack," as the switch-tender was called, must be tampered with—he must by fair means or foul be kept from his post that night; how it was to be done no man stopped to consider, but it may well be conceived that very nice notions of duty or of the value of human life were not rife amongst those who could devise an enterprise of this nature. They were quite ready to believe that the switch-tender only wanted a sufficiently tempting bribe to entice him from the path of duty; if not—and there were ugly looks all round—other means of silencing him were at their disposal.

The log-cabin of Junction Jack stood quite close to the line, and was a low, roughly-built structure consisting of two rooms. It was in the centre of a small clearing, where some attempt at order was observable; vegetables were arranged in neat rows, and one small patch in front was dedicated to the cultivation of such simple flowers as one may see any day growing wild.

It was the early part of the fall. All through the long summer Jack had devoted his spare time to the putting up of his new log-house. Every block was hewn and firmly fastened together, the roughly-glazed windows put in, the smart picket round the clearing set up—all by his own hands—and with a will, for at Christmas he was to marry Margie Dewar. He had just finished rigging up a set of shelves for Margie's books and work; three shelves in a niche beside the stove; and when he had driven home the last nail he stepped back and looked at his work, whistling softly.

Then he crossed the floor to an old locker and brought out half-a-dozen thumbed and well-worn books; the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' a well-worn Bible and Prayer Book bound together in a faded green cover, and a couple of volumes of Dickens which had found their way across the Atlantic to this remote spot.

Having arranged these to his satisfaction, after changing their position several times and looking at the whole from different points of view, Jack heaved a sigh of content from the depths of his capacious chest, unrolled his shirt-sleeves and shook himself into his jacket. He then made up the fire, broiled himself a slice of pork and sat down to his lonely supper—a thing he never did without a rapid mental calculation of the number of days that must elapse before the sweet face of Margie Dewar would confront him on the other side of the stove.

A couple of miles away down the line stood the substantial homestead of the Dewar family, and about half-way between this and his cabin was a little hut beside the track just large enough to shelter him from wind and rain in the performance of his duty. At nine o'clock every night he was there at his post listening for the rumbling of the heavy cars, which could be heard in that pure atmosphere long before they came in sight; and it was Junction Jack's important office to clear the road for the safe transit of the mail which followed close on the heels of her slow and cumbersome sister; for the safety of both trains he and he alone was responsible, and it was the most interesting duty of his dull and monotonous routine.

He led a lonely life, for beyond an occasional "Good night, mate!" from the locomotive drivers, Junction Jack held but little communication with his fellows, his instructions with his pay being transmitted weekly through the conductor of the freight train, who, in passing, flung the package containing these at Jack's feet; he was stationed fully fifty miles from the nearest depôt, no such surprising fact when

we remember that the track runs for a thousand miles and more through the forests and prairies of the Far West.

Jack was a fine broad-shouldered fellow, true to his post, and all of his big heart that wasn't given up to his duty was enslaved by Margie, and he would not have changed places with the President.

Well, Margie was a girl to be proud of. There is a simple daguerreotype on the shelf, of a vastly inferior kind, and executed by a wandering artist. Look at the soft eyes, the sunny face and bright hair framed in a cunning little pink calico bonnet. Junction Jack looked again and again as he sat there, and he heaved another big sigh of satisfaction every time.

His simple meal finished, he began to prepare for his walk down the line to the Junction. This spot was sacred to the lonely man's one romance; here Margie had promised to be his; here Margie had given him shyly the first kiss, the remembrance of which thrilled him still; here they had met evening after evening all the summer through to discuss the progress of the log cabin and their plans for the future.

Would Jack and Margie meet to-night as usual?

Jack hadn't a doubt of it; he had raked together the ashes, lighted the lamp which he always left burning, and set it on the window-ledge, when a sound of footsteps fell on his ear. He strode to the door, and was confronted on the threshold by a man, dusty and travel-stained, who unceremoniously entered the cabin, seated himself uninvited by the stove, and began to knock the ashes out of his pipe. He was armed and fully equipped for riding; while the lower part of his face was covered by a dark beard, his eyes and forehead were almost hidden by a wide hat drawn low over them.

Jack turned a little reluctantly—his lonely life had not rendered him very sociable and hospitable to strangers.

"Been riding far?" he inquired.

"A matter of a few miles," replied the visitor carelessly, lighting his pipe and beginning to smoke. "Anything to drink handy?"

Jack set the whiskey bottle and a glass before him, and asked:

"Going on to-night?"

"Maybe I am," said the stranger; and then looking up at his host: "Where are you off to in such a hurry? Sit down, man! I want a talk with you!"

"Then short and sharp's the word," said Jack, good-humouredly, sitting down on a barrel. "I've a bit of work down yonder that won't wait!"

"You may as well let it be at this hour of night; it's time for a pipe and a glass of this good stuff, man!"

Jack turned round; he had risen, and was half-way to the door.

"Perhaps," said the stranger, looking at him keenly, "perhaps it might be worth your while not to go down to that same bit of work to-night!"

"D'you know what you're talking about?" demanded Jack angrily, roused by something in the other's manner. "It's a matter of life and death, I tell you, and I'm off! I'll sit with you as long as you like when I'm through—stop till I come back if you choose!"

The stranger rose to his feet coolly. "Then you'll lose the best bit of work you ever did in your life, my man! And all—I reckon I can see as far as most men—all for a word with the owner of this pretty face here," and he reached up for the little portrait on the mantel-shelf.

Jack was at the door, but he strode back at this.

"Hands off!" cried the stranger. "I can have a look at it, I suppose, or any other man?"

Jack stood savagely silent; there was no valid reason for his objection to have Margie's beauty admired by this cool and uncereemonious visitor.

"What's your business with me?" he demanded at last. "Out with it quick! I want to be off!"

The other removed his pipe before he answered slowly:

"Well, I guess I won't waste ammunition by firing any more in the air!" He hesitated a moment, fixing his eye on Jack. "There's money in it—a clean three or four thousand for you and me and some others—if—you'll stop away from the Junction to-night!"

"What d'you mean?" asked Jack again. "Do you know there's wholesale murder in the plan you're proposing?"

The stranger shrugged his shoulders carelessly. "Look here, my man! I'll make it all square for you. I've got something here which will make you sleep like the dead till morning—or, if you don't take to that dodge, why, once out of this, as we shall all be by dawn—come, give us your fist on it!" and he advanced with an air of cordiality.

But Jack started back as if he had been shot. The hideousness of the proposition dawned on him and turned his blood to fire. Snatching his derringier from the mantel-shelf—

"Stand off!" he shouted, "or I'll put a bullet into you! Whoever you are, if there's law in the country, you shall swing for this!"

The other remained outwardly calm, and there was an ominous gleam in his eye. He made no answer, but raised his hand quickly—a signal agreed on—for with a crash of glass, the barrel of a rifle protruded through the window, covering Jack's movements, and a hoarse voice shouted from the darkness without—

"Blaze away, Captain! I told ye the fellow would show fight!"

Jack sprang back to the wall and stood firm against it, his great chest heaving, his grey eyes flashing, and lips set together. A howl of execration followed, and then the men of Niger's Creek poured into the cabin.

Meanwhile at the farm the evening meal had been cleared away, and Margie, free from household duties, was engaged in the essentially

feminine occupation of tying the strings of her bonnet before the little oval mirror, which hung on the wall, and reflected her features somewhat imperfectly—for plate-glass was unknown in these regions. Then she stepped through the porch where the rosy flush of the sunset enveloped her, lending a tender bloom to her cheek, and a dewy brightness to her eyes.

Margie Dewar was no beauty, in the common acceptance of the term; in a Boston drawing-room she would probably have passed unnoticed, for there was not a perfect feature in her face. But she was the daughter of the sunshine and the fragrant breeze, and many a city belle would have envied her the clear pink and white of her complexion, the strength and grace of her perfectly-proportioned figure, the dainty poise of her head, the lightness and freedom of her footstep, and the sweetness of her winning smile—outcome of her simple life and pure and happy thoughts!

Through the yard she walked where the feathered creatures fluttered round looking for something from her hand—through the field of ripening grain, and then turned into the little track beside the line. And here she quickened her steps, one brown hand shading her eyes, as she looked expectantly up the line, though she knew well, foolish Margie! that she could not see Jack yet.

The sun had dipped behind the distant ridge, the red glow had changed to purple, and was darkening every instant into deeper shadow, when Margie reached the Junction.

She had to peer close into the little hut before she could be certain it was empty. She brought out the lantern, lighted it, and hung it on a post as she had seen Jack do many times, then she sat down on the bank where he had carved a rough seat in the brown earth and lined it with velvet moss for her. She clasped her hands round her knees and bent her face on them, singing softly to herself, and the tones of her fresh young voice mingled with the hum of insects, while all the still air of the coming night was fragrant with the sweet scent of herb and flower.

How long she sat there she knew not; but at last she lifted her head to listen to a distant rumbling.

An instant of suspense and Margie leaped to her feet. She knew the sound well—it was the train—and Junction Jack, for the first time in his years of service, was away from his post.

The girl prang down the bank, striving to pierce the gloom. No Jack was to be seen, but there were the headlights of the advancing train, fast nearing the Junction. What was she to do? She knew well that the express was due in a few moments and a terrible collision was inevitable.

There was only a moment of indecision. Margie was accustomed to emergencies and the necessity for immediate action—she remembered how often she had watched Jack at his duty, and now she flung herself on the great switch handles and pressed them down with all her strength.

Only just in time, for the next moment the heavy freight train was rolling past—she held on till the last car had passed her, and she saw its receding lights swing off on to the siding. Her work was done, for the train was saved, and her grasp loosened, the heavy handles turned slowly back, and she stood cold and trembling now that the moment of exertion was over.

The distant rumbling ceased and only the occasional cry of a night-bird broke the stillness, while Margie stood motionless, her brain busy with conjecture, her heart beating with a thousand apprehensions for her lover. And suddenly with a shriek and a wild rush the mail thundered up, past the junction—on, past the silent log-house—and away in the far distance leaving a long trail of wreathing vapour in its wake.

Then Margie, stirred into action by the swift rush of the wheels and the panting breath of the flying locomotive, snatched up the lantern and sped down the track.

In sight of the still dark cabin she stopped and uttered a peculiar cry, but the sound fell on deaf ears, and no answer came from him who was used to respond so gladly—and Margie, nameless terrors oppressing her, sprang on and burst open the door.

The light of her lantern showed her the cabin in wild disorder, and there Jack lay, bound and helpless—his head fallen inert among the ashes of the stove, and the dark blood ebbing slowly from an ugly wound.

Margie was no fainting heroine to be unnerved at the sight of blood, but she could not repress a sob as she knelt at his side, cut his bonds with fingers that never trembled, and lifting his head to the support of her arm began to feel for the signs of life. And her touch roused him. He opened his dull eyes and tried to raise himself, whispering faintly: "God; bless you, Margie! Did you—save—the——" Then his eyes closed again and his head dropped.

But Junction Jack didn't die, for youth and hope and courage will work wonders. All through that long, long night did Margie staunch the ebbing life-blood, and lifting him in her strong young arms with tender care, did she try to inspire his sinking frame with the life of her own bounding pulses. As the first grey streak of dawn gleamed through the shattered casement hasty steps approached the cabin and the girl's lonely watch was over.

Carried carefully to the farm, Jack found kind and capable nurses there, and at Christmas he was strong and well as ever when the minister came to join his hands and Margie's. And the log-house, enlarged and substantially rebuilt—its owner prosperous with the reward that was voted him for his bravery—is peopled with a merry company of little folks who with sweet young voices love to tell the tale "How mother saved the mail and father too!"

EVELYN MOORE.

LAND AND SEA.

Ballade.

WHEN through deep summer lanes I tread,
Wild briar-roses on each hand,
Flushing and paling white and red,
I'll sing the beauties of the land.
On lonely shores majestic, grand,
Where curling waves dash fierce and free,
Foaming and breaking on the strand,
I'll sound the praises of the sea.

When daisied meadows round me spread,
And kine knee-deep in sorrel stand,
And larks soar thrilling overhead,
I'll sing the beauties of the land.
When o'er wide wastes of level sand,
The plaintive note is borne to me
Of curlews wheeling in a band,
I'll sound the praises of the sea.

When silvery gleams the lily-bed
In moonlit gardens zephyr-fanned,
And love in lover's eyes is read,
I'll sing the beauties of the land.
When emerald waters vast are spanned
By rainbow arc ere daylight flee,
And flying sails by us are scanned,
I'll sound the praises of the sea.

Envoy.

Lady, with joy at thy command,
I'll sing the beauties of the land;
But if it more will pleasure thee
I'll sound the praises of the sea.

E. LEITH.





"LADY PELL, LAST NIGHT I SAW THE GREY BROTHER."

